Where the Roads Split: Word of the Kingdom Theology and the Wider Religious Landscape — Part Two

Paper 12 in a 12 Part Series

by Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

Part One of this paper followed roads that split at the foundations. The groups it surveyed confess a different God, or let a founder's voice decide what Scripture means, or keep the name "Christ" while emptying it of the man Jesus from Nazareth. Those departures are serious, but they're also easy to see once a reader knows where to look.

The roads in Part Two are harder to see, because they leave from much closer to home. Nearly every movement surveyed here confesses the same God, the same Christ, and the same Bible this series does. Some of them sit in the next pew. What divides them from Word of the Kingdom theology isn't the foundation. It's what gets built on it, and the questions are ones this series has spent eleven papers on: when the kingdom comes, who Israel is, and how the ages end.

That makes Part Two the place where this series has the most to explain about itself. Several of these movements use its own words. They speak of overcomers, of sons of God being revealed, of reigning with Christ, of rewards for the faithful, of Israel's promises still standing, of *aionios* as "age-lasting." A reader who hears those words from Word of the Kingdom teachers and from these movements will fairly ask whether they're the same thing. They aren't, and the work of this half of the paper is to show exactly where each road turns.

Part One left a saying worth carrying into Part Two: same vocabulary, different dictionaries. In Part One the dictionaries differed on the meaning of God and of Christ. Here they mostly agree on those and differ on time. Each of the first two movements below takes something Scripture promises for the age to come and claims it for this one. The movements after them take Israel's promises and hand them to someone else. And the last takes the series' own reading of the ages and carries it somewhere the text won't go.

The method is the same as in Part One. Each movement is described from its own published teaching before anything is said against it. Authors are named where their published books are cited, and living people are not otherwise named. And the judgment throughout is about teaching. It isn't a verdict on the standing of anyone who holds it (2 Tim. 2:19).

Where the Road Splits at the Timing of the Kingdom

This series' third paper sets out the question this section turns on. Jesus is seated now at the Father's right hand as High Priest, "from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool" (Heb. 10:13). He hasn't yet taken His own throne (Rev. 3:21). The kingdom, with its heavenly and earthly portions, comes when He comes, and the rewards of the Judgment Seat are handed out then: "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works" (Matt. 16:27). The two movements in this section accept

almost all of that in principle. In practice, each one moves a piece of the age to come into this one. The Word of Faith movement collects the reward now. The New Apostolic Reformation claims the reign now. Both of them stand on a third claim, which classical Pentecostalism also holds: that the sign gifts of the Gospels and Acts belong to the present age. So that's where this section starts.

Classical Pentecostalism and the sign gifts

The Pentecostal movement grew out of a Bible school in Topeka, Kansas, in 1901 and the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles from 1906. Its largest body, the Assemblies of God, is Trinitarian and stands with this series on most of what Part One examined. But its Statement of Fundamental Truths also teaches that "the baptism of believers in the Holy Ghost is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues," that "deliverance from sickness is provided for in the atonement," and that the gifts of the Spirit operate in the Church today. In practice the sign gifts sit at the center of Pentecostal worship. A service may include speaking in tongues, sometimes followed by an interpretation, and words of prophecy spoken to the congregation. Worship is often physical: hands raised, people kneeling, dancing, or falling to the floor in what's called being "slain in the Spirit." Prayer for the sick usually means the laying on of hands, and often anointing with oil (Jas. 5:14), by ministers and members believed to have received "gifts of healings" (1 Cor. 12:9). Many churches hold altar services where seekers wait to be baptized in the Spirit and speak in tongues for the first time.

Where the roads run together. A great deal of road runs side by side here. The Assemblies of God are premillennial: they teach the visible return of Christ to reign on the earth for a thousand years. They take the Holy Spirit's present work seriously and expect a Christian's life to show it. They read Scripture as God's word, plainly meant to be obeyed. A Word of the Kingdom reader has more in common with a classical Pentecostal than with most of the traditions this series compares. The disagreement that follows is between people on the same road.

Where they split. The disagreement is about dispensation, and it begins with what the signs were for. When God sent Moses to Egypt, He gave him signs "that they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers... has appeared to you" (Exod. 4:5), and "they" were Israel. Paul says the same of his own day: "For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:22). When Jesus sent out the Twelve with power to heal, He sent them only "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," with one message: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 10:6-8). The signs went with the offer of the kingdom to the nation. Hebrews gives them a name that says where they belong:

> For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come... (Heb. 6:4-5)

The powers of the age to come. The signs were a foretaste of the kingdom, set before Israel while the kingdom was being offered to her. Paul's own explanation of tongues points the same way. He quotes Isaiah, "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people," and concludes that "tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers" (1 Cor. 14:21-22). "This people" in Isaiah 28:11 is Israel.

Acts follows that offer through its last chapter. Again and again the apostles go "to the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16), and the signs go with them. At the end of Acts, Paul tells the Jewish leaders of Rome that "the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" (Acts 28:28), and the book closes. The letters written after that point read differently. Paul leaves Trophimus "sick at Miletus" (2 Tim. 4:20). He tells Timothy to "use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities" (1 Tim. 5:23). Epaphroditus was "sick almost unto death," and Paul speaks of his recovery as God's mercy, not as a healing anyone performed (Phil. 2:27). The same apostle whose handkerchiefs once carried healing (Acts 19:11-12) no longer heals his own coworkers.

The vocabulary of filling with the Spirit shows a related pattern. Luke's word *pimplemi* describes a sudden filling, and almost every time it's followed at once by inspired speech: Elizabeth (Luke 1:41-42), Zacharias (Luke 1:67), the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:4), Peter before the council (Acts 4:8), and Paul before Elymas (Acts 13:9-10). The command Paul gives the Ephesians uses a different verb, *pleroo*, in the present tense: "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18), a filling that goes on and shows itself in worship, thanksgiving, and submission to one another (Eph. 5:19-21). The first belongs to moments of sign and testimony; the second is the Christian's ordinary walk. That observation doesn't prove the case on its own, but it fits it.

None of this denies that God heals, answers prayer, or acts in power today. He does, as He wills (1 John 5:14-15). What this series questions is more specific. The sign gifts were given to confirm the message of the kingdom while it was being offered to Israel (Heb. 2:3-4). When Israel turned that offer down for the last time (Acts 28:28), the signs that went with it had done their work, and this series doesn't expect the Church to carry them as part of its ordinary life today. The two movements that follow have built a great deal on the opposite expectation.

The Word of Faith movement: the reward collected now

The Word of Faith movement traces its distinctive teaching to E. W. Kenyon (1867-1948), an evangelist and Bible school founder whose books on faith and the believer's authority were taken up and spread by Kenneth E. Hagin (1917-2003). Hagin founded Rhema Bible Training Center near Tulsa in 1974, and through it and through teachers such as Kenneth and Gloria Copeland the message reached television audiences worldwide. Where the movement came from is disputed. D. R. McConnell's *A Different Gospel* (1988) traced Kenyon's ideas to the New Thought and mind-cure movements described in Part One, and documented how heavily Hagin borrowed from Kenyon. Kenyon's defenders, among them Joe McIntyre in *E. W. Kenyon and His Message of Faith* (1997), deny the New Thought link and place Kenyon in the evangelical holiness stream of his day. This paper doesn't need to settle that history; the published teaching is enough.

What the movement teaches. Its central teaching is the power of the spoken word of faith. Jesus said that "whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says" (Mark 11:23), and Word of Faith teachers read that as a spiritual law: faith spoken aloud brings into being what it confesses. Hagin taught it in four steps in *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God* (1979): say it, do it, receive it, tell it. From there the movement teaches that health and prosperity are already the Christian's by right. Hagin's *Redeemed from Poverty, Sickness and Spiritual Death* and Gloria Copeland's *God's Will Is Prosperity* (1978) put the claim in their titles. The

usual texts are Isaiah 53:5, "by His stripes we are healed"; Galatians 3:13-14, where Christ redeemed us so that "the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles"; and 3 John 2, "I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health." Sickness and want, on this teaching, are signs that a Christian hasn't yet laid hold of what is his.

Two further teachings reach back into Part One's territory. Kenyon's *What Happened from the Cross to the Throne* (1945) taught that Jesus died spiritually as well as physically, took on Satan's nature, and was born again in hell before He rose, and the teaching passed into the movement. And several Word of Faith teachers have spoken of Christians as "little gods," sharing God's own kind of being. Not every teacher in the movement holds these, and Hagin himself warned against the excesses of prosperity teaching late in life in *The Midas Touch* (2000). But they come from the movement's own books.

Where the roads run together. This stretch of road is closer to this series than most readers would guess. Word of Faith teachers insist that God rewards faith, that faith acts and isn't a bare opinion, and that God means His people to receive what He promises. This series agrees with every one of those: "he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). The series' whole teaching on the Judgment Seat rests on rewards being real, earned by faithfulness, and worth wanting.

Where they split: when the reward is paid. The split is about the calendar. The movement takes what Scripture promises at Christ's coming and collects it now, in health and money. Scripture keeps attaching the reward to a day still ahead:

> Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Tim. 4:8)

The crown is "laid up," waiting. It's given "on that Day," and it goes to those who "have loved His appearing," men whose hearts are set on a coming they haven't yet seen. Jesus says the same: "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me" (Rev. 22:12). Hebrews says it of the whole roll of the faithful: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13).

Paul met the Word of Faith outlook in Corinth, nineteen centuries early. The Corinthians were living as though the kingdom had already arrived for them, and he answered with sarcasm:

> You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you! (1 Cor. 4:8)

Then he describes his own life: "To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless" (1 Cor. 4:11). Paul doesn't deny that the rich reign is coming; he wishes it were here, so that he could share it. He denies that it's here yet.

The proof texts read differently when read in context. Matthew tells us when Isaiah 53:4 was fulfilled: Jesus "healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet" (Matt. 8:16-17), during His ministry to Israel. Peter applies Isaiah 53:5 to sin: "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for

righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). The body's full redemption is still ahead (Rom. 8:23). The "blessing of Abraham" in Galatians 3:14 is named in the same verse: "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." And 3 John 2 is a greeting from an elder to a friend, a wish for his health, tied to the health of his soul. It isn't a promise, and it isn't a law.

Jesus warned about collecting rewards early. Of those who give and pray to be seen, He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward" (Matt. 6:2), meaning it's been paid in full and there's nothing more owed. Then: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:19-20). Paul is blunter. He names men "who suppose that godliness is a means of gain" and says, "From such withdraw yourself. Now godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:5-6). A teaching that tells Christians to claim their reward in this life is teaching them to trade the crown for the change in their pocket.

Where they split: what happened at the cross. The teaching that Jesus died spiritually and was born again in hell runs into what Jesus said with His last breath: "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit'" (Luke 23:46). His spirit went to the Father. His soul went to Hades, as Peter says, quoting the psalm, "You will not leave my soul in Hades" (Acts 2:27), and His body went to the tomb. He'd already said of the work of redemption, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). Paul puts the peace where Jesus put it, "through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20), and Hebrews says He entered the Most Holy Place "with His own blood" (Heb. 9:12). The payment was made on the cross, in the open, by a Son whose spirit was in His Father's hands. And the "little gods" teaching meets the verse that answered it in Part One: "Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me" (Isa. 43:10).

The New Apostolic Reformation: the reign claimed now

Of every movement in this paper, this one deserves the closest reading by a Word of the Kingdom reader, because it uses more of this series' vocabulary than any other. It speaks of overcomers, of sons of God being revealed, of a company of Christians set apart from the rest of the Church to rule with Christ. A critic who hears those words from this series and has met them first in this movement will assume they're the same teaching. The history explains why the words sound alike, and the Scripture explains why the teaching isn't.

Where it came from. In 1948 a revival broke out at a Bible school and orphanage in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, and spread quickly through Pentecostal churches in Canada and the United States as the "Latter Rain" movement. It taught that God was restoring the offices of apostle and prophet and pouring out a last great revival before Christ's return. The Assemblies of God formally disapproved of it in 1949. Its most influential book was George Warnock's *The Feast of Tabernacles* (1951). Warnock read the feasts of Leviticus 23 as a map of Church history, with Passover fulfilled at the cross, Pentecost at Acts 2, and Tabernacles in a coming revival, when a company of perfected overcomers would come to maturity. That teaching came to be called the Manifest Sons of God. Its key text was Romans 8:19, "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God," and it taught that these sons would be revealed, perfected, and even made immortal in this age, and that they would subdue the earth for Christ before He returned.

In the 1990s C. Peter Wagner, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, gave the network that grew from these roots the name it carries now, the New Apostolic Reformation. Its churches recognize living apostles and prophets as the governing offices of the Church. Wagner's *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (2008) pressed the movement toward taking authority over society, and in 2007 he wrote that "our theological bedrock is what has been known as Dominion Theology." Its best-known program is the Seven Mountain Mandate, set out in books such as Lance Wallnau and Bill Johnson's *Invading Babylon* (2013), which calls Christians to take control of seven spheres of culture: family, religion, education, media, arts and entertainment, business, and government. Much of the movement's eschatology runs the same direction. Harold Eberle and Martin Trench's *Victorious Eschatology* (2006) teaches that the Church will grow until it fills the earth before Christ returns. For a careful outside account, Holly Pivec and R. Douglas Geivett's *A New Apostolic Reformation?* (2014) is the standard work.

The package often comes without the name. Mercy Culture Church in Fort Worth, Texas, is one example of how the parts sit together in a single church's published statement. It teaches that "the five-fold ministry of Ephesians 4 governs the Church," that the baptism in the Holy Spirit comes "with the primary evidence of speaking in other tongues," and that "divine healing is provided for believers in the atonement." And on the future it says, "The final judgment will determine the eternal status of both the saints and the unbelievers" — one verdict deciding the standing of saved and unsaved together, which is the reverse of the series of judgments Scripture sets out (2 Cor. 5:10; Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15).

Where the roads run together. The overlap is in exactly the words that matter most to this series. There's a company of overcomers who rule with Christ (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21). There's a revealing of the sons of God that creation is waiting for (Rom. 8:19). There's a distinction among Christians: not every Christian will reign, and faithfulness decides who does (2 Tim. 2:12). And there's a kingdom that will really govern the earth. Word of the Kingdom theology teaches every one of those. A reader who knows only the Manifest Sons teaching will hear this series and think he's heard it before.

Where they split: when the sons are revealed. The difference is first one of timing, and Paul settles it in the passage the movement leans on most. Read on four verses past Romans 8:19:

> Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. (Rom. 8:23)

The revealing of the sons is the adoption, and the adoption is "the redemption of our body." Christians are *waiting* for it, groaning, in the same breath in which creation waits. It doesn't happen in a revival. It happens when bodies are redeemed, and that's at Christ's coming: "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4). The overcomer's promise of rule is fastened to the same moment: "But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations" (Rev. 2:25-26). *Till I come.To him I will give.* The rule is given, and it's given after He arrives.

Where they split: who takes the kingdom. The second difference is about who does the taking. Daniel saw the kingdoms of this world as a great image, and he saw how it would fall:

> You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces... And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. (Dan. 2:34, 44)

"Cut out without hands." The kingdom that replaces the kingdoms of men isn't built up by men from inside them, sphere by sphere. God sets it up, and it strikes. Revelation says the same at the seventh trumpet: "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15). They become His when He takes them.

This series' Saul-and-David picture shows the posture Scripture expects in the meantime. David was anointed king while Saul still reigned (1 Sam. 16:13). He had the right to the throne, and twice he had Saul at the point of his sword. Both times he refused to take it: "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him" (1 Sam. 24:6). He gathered faithful men around him in the cave of Adullam (1 Sam. 22:1-2), and he waited for God to remove the rejected king. Satan is the disqualified incumbent of this world, "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4): appointed once, rejected, and not yet removed. Jesus, the anointed King, is doing what David did: waiting (Heb. 10:13) and gathering the faithful who will reign with Him. A Church that sets out to take the throne before the King takes it isn't following David. It's doing what David refused to do.

The Bride makes the same point in Revelation. When the marriage of the Lamb comes, "His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright" (Rev. 19:7-8). Her readiness is her own faithfulness, but her glory is granted. In the Manifest Sons teaching the overcomers perfect themselves and bring in the kingdom. In Scripture they're made ready and then clothed, and the King brings the kingdom.

Where they split: apostles and prophets. The movement's claim to living apostles runs into what the New Testament says about the office. An apostle had to have seen the risen Lord (Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor. 9:1). The apostles and prophets were the Church's foundation (Eph. 2:20), and a foundation is laid once. The names of "the twelve apostles of the Lamb" are written on the foundations of the city (Rev. 21:14). The men who laid the foundation had seen Him, and the foundation isn't laid again.

A Reformed counterpart. Dominion teaching isn't only a charismatic phenomenon. Christian Reconstructionism, set out in R. J. Rushdoony's *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (1973) and Greg Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (1977), teaches from a Reformed and postmillennial starting point that the nations should be governed by the civil law of Moses as the gospel advances and Christ's kingdom fills the earth before He returns. It reaches the same present-tense kingdom by a different road, and it meets the same answers: the kingdom comes when the King comes (Matt. 25:31), and the Law was given to one nation. "He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation" (Ps. 147:19-20).

None of this makes the Christian's present life passive. He's an ambassador now (2 Cor. 5:20), representing a King whose kingdom isn't yet set up in the land where he serves. He prays for those in authority, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" (1 Tim. 2:2). He works, gives, serves, and suffers as one who will give account. And he lives as a citizen of

somewhere else: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20).

Where the Road Splits at Who Israel Is

This series' sixth paper is built on a distinction most of the Church has let go: Israel and the Church are two peoples with two callings. Israel as a nation forfeited the heavenly portion of the kingdom when she rejected her Messiah (Matt. 21:43), and she keeps the earthly promises God swore to her fathers, "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). The Church has been offered the heavenly portion Israel let go. Replacement theology erases that distinction from one side, by making the Church the new Israel and leaving the nation nothing. The movements in this section erase it from the other side. They take Israel seriously, sometimes more seriously than anyone around them, and then they make Gentile Christians into Israel.

Hebrew Roots and the Two-House teaching

The Hebrew Roots movement grew in the 1980s and 1990s among Christians drawn to the Jewish setting of the Bible. In its milder forms it's a study of that setting, and much of that study is good. In its fuller forms it teaches that Gentile Christians are bound to keep the Law of Moses: the seventh-day Sabbath, the feasts of Leviticus 23, and the dietary laws. Many of its congregations prefer Hebrew names, *Yeshua* for Jesus and *Yahweh* for the LORD, and many reject Christmas and Easter as pagan.

The Two-House (or Ephraimite) teaching carries the idea a step further. It holds that the ten northern tribes, scattered by Assyria in the eighth century B.C., lost their identity among the nations, and that many Gentiles drawn to the Torah today are their physical descendants without knowing it. Ephraim is "the stick" of Ezekiel 37, and the joining of the two sticks is happening now as these Gentiles discover who they are. The teaching reads Jacob's blessing over Ephraim, "his descendants shall become a multitude of nations" (Gen. 48:19), as a prophecy that his line would become the Gentile world, and it reads Paul's "fullness of the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:25) as that same multitude coming home.

British Israelism

An older form of the same idea named the lost tribes more specifically. British Israelism, popularized in the nineteenth century by books such as John Wilson's *Our Israelitish Origin* (1840), taught that the Anglo-Saxon peoples descend from the ten tribes, with Britain as Ephraim and the United States as Manasseh, and that the birthright promises to Joseph's sons were fulfilled in the wealth and power of the British Empire and America. Part One met it already in Herbert W. Armstrong's *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*, and his successors abandoned it. The Christadelphians, who agree with this series about so much of the kingdom, list it among the doctrines they reject.

Where the roads run together. These movements share real ground with this series. They refuse replacement theology. They expect Israel's promises to be kept as given, land and all. They read Ezekiel 37 as a real future reunion of Judah and Ephraim. They honor the Law as God's word and the Old Testament as the Christian's Bible. And they're right that the Church has often read the

New Testament as if it were written in a vacuum, without the Jewish setting that gives so much of it its meaning.

Where they split: Gentiles stay Gentiles. Paul's own picture of the olive tree keeps the two kinds of branches distinct even after the grafting:

> For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? (Rom. 11:24)

The Gentile is grafted in "contrary to nature," and he stays a wild branch. He doesn't become a natural one. Two verses later Paul sets the two groups side by side in a single sentence: "blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:25-26). If the fullness of the Gentiles *were* Ephraim, all Israel would already be saved the moment it came in, and the "and so" would have nothing left to describe. Paul uses Hosea the same way. He quotes "I will call them My people, who were not My people" of "us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles" (Rom. 9:24-25). God calls Gentiles His people *as Gentiles*. Paul never tells them they were Israelites all along.

The apostles settled the Law question for Gentile Christians in Jerusalem, and they settled it against the Hebrew Roots answer. Peter asked, "why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10), and the letter that went out asked Gentiles to keep only a short list of necessary things (Acts 15:28-29). Paul's word to Gentile Christians being pressed into the Law was, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1). The Sabbath and the feasts, as Part One showed, are a sign between God and Israel (Exod. 31:16-17) and "a shadow of things to come" (Col. 2:16-17).

Where they split: the tribes were never lost. The Two-House teaching and British Israelism both need the ten tribes to have vanished, and Scripture keeps finding them. When the kingdom divided, "those from all the tribes of Israel, such as set their heart to seek the LORD God of Israel, came to Jerusalem" (2 Chron. 11:16). Men of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun came to Hezekiah's Passover (2 Chron. 30:11). Anna, who greeted the infant Jesus in the temple, was "of the tribe of Asher" (Luke 2:36). Paul told King Agrippa of the promise "to which our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain" (Acts 26:7), and James wrote "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (Jas. 1:1). The tribes were scattered, and some of them are hidden in the sense that no one can trace them now, but God knows where every one of them is.

Where they split: when the sticks are joined. Ezekiel says what the joining of the two sticks looks like, and it isn't the forming of a congregation:

> "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all." (Ezek. 37:21-22)

The reunion happens in the land, when God gathers the nation out of the nations, and "David My servant shall be king over them" (Ezek. 37:24). It's the earthly portion of the kingdom, restored to Israel at the King's coming. A Gentile Christian who claims a place in it is reaching for the portion

Israel keeps and setting down the one he's been offered, for the Church is "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1).

A distinction worth keeping. Messianic Jews, Jewish men and women who believe Jesus is their Messiah and keep their Jewish identity and customs, aren't part of this section. Paul himself lived as a Jew among Jews (1 Cor. 9:20) and kept a vow in the temple (Acts 21:20-26). A Jew who honors his people's customs hasn't left the road. The road splits only when Gentiles are told the Law binds them, or that they're secretly Israel. Israel is "a people dwelling alone, Not reckoning itself among the nations" (Num. 23:9), and the Gentile Christian's calling is a different one.

Where the Road Splits at the End of the Ages

The last road in this paper runs alongside this series for a long way on a question most of the Church treats as closed. This series' fifth paper teaches that *aionios* means "pertaining to the age," bounded by the age it belongs to, and its fourth teaches that the vocabulary of fire and darkness is the language of judgment and separation rather than a map of literal places. Christian universalism reads the same words much the same way. Then it carries them to a destination this series doesn't reach: in the end, it holds, every person who has ever lived will be brought to God.

Christian universalism

The idea is old. Origen of Alexandria, in the third century, taught a final restoration of all things (Greek *apokatastasis*), and Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century taught something like it. In recent decades it has found able defenders inside evangelical and Orthodox scholarship: Thomas Talbott's *The Inescapable Love of God* (1999), Robin Parry's *The Evangelical Universalist* (2006, first published under the name Gregory MacDonald), and David Bentley Hart's *That All Shall Be Saved* (2019). Hart's own translation of the New Testament (2017) shows the overlap with this series in a single verse. Where the NKJV reads, "these will go away into everlasting [age-lasting] punishment, but the righteous into eternal [age-lasting] life" (Matt. 25:46), Hart renders it, "these shall go to the chastening of that Age, but the just to the life of that Age."

The universalist case usually rests on a handful of texts. God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). God will "reconcile all things to Himself" (Col. 1:20). Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11). At the end God will be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). And Peter says Christ "preached to the spirits in prison" (1 Pet. 3:19) and that "the gospel was preached also to those who are dead" (1 Pet. 4:6), which universalists take as evidence that the gospel reaches past death.

Where the roads run together. The overlap is real. Both read *aionios* as tied to an age rather than as a bare word for endlessness. Both read *kolasis* in Matthew 25:46 as corrective rather than merely retributive. Both decline to treat the lake of fire as a literal place of flame. Both take God's love for the whole world seriously, and both look for a restoration of creation at the end of the ages (Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:21). A reader who meets universalist writers after reading this series' fifth paper will recognize the word studies, and he may wonder whether this series is halfway down the universalist road.

Where they split: who Matthew 25 is about. The overlap on Matthew 25:46 is narrower than it looks. In this series' reading, the scene is the judgment of the nations when the Son of Man comes in His glory at the end of the Tribulation (Matt. 25:31-32), and those gathered before Him are living Gentiles who come through that period, judged by how they treated "the least of these My brethren" (Matt. 25:40), Jesus' own people Israel. What's at stake is entrance into the kingdom, and both the life and the punishment are bounded by that age. The verse doesn't describe the unsaved dead at all. Universalism takes a corrective word from a scene about the living at the start of the kingdom and stretches it over every person who has ever died outside Christ.

Where they split: what happens after the ages. The unsaved dead come before God at the end of the thousand years, not at its beginning. John saw "the dead, small and great, standing before God" (Rev. 20:12), judged according to their works, and "anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15). That's the second death. And here the two readings of the ages part company for good. When the ages of this creation run out, death itself is destroyed: "The last enemy that will be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26). If the second death were a kind of dying, a corrective that runs its course, it would end there too. It doesn't. Of the devil and those with him, John says they "will be tormented day and night forever and ever [unto the ages of the ages]" (Rev. 20:10). The second death outlasts death because it was never a dying in the first place. It's the name for separation from God, and separation is a state a person remains in, not an event that runs its course, though what a Christian suffers from it at the Judgment Seat is bounded by the kingdom age (Rev. 2:11). This series' reading needs neither annihilation nor an endless process of dying, and it doesn't leave room for an emptied lake either.

Where they split: when a person is made alive. Scripture puts the turning point in this life. A person is made alive by believing: "you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins... For by grace you have been saved through faith" (Eph. 2:1, 8). "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). There's no text that shows anyone dead in spirit being made alive after death. God's desire that all be saved is real (1 Tim. 2:4), and the provision is for the whole world (1 John 2:2). But a provision is received by believing, and the one who never believes never came to salvation in the first place.

The universalist texts read differently in their places. "In Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22) is about resurrection, and Paul goes straight on: "But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming" (1 Cor. 15:23). Everyone is raised. Not everyone is raised to the same thing. The reconciliation of Colossians 1:20 reaches "things on earth or things in heaven," while the bowing of Philippians 2:10 reaches further, to "those under the earth." Paul names the wider circle for the bowing and the narrower one for the reconciling, and every knee that bows isn't every heart that's reconciled. God's being "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28) comes after every enemy has been put "under His feet" (1 Cor. 15:25), and an enemy under foot has been subdued, not won over. The "spirits in prison" of 1 Peter 3:19 are tied to "the days of Noah" (1 Pet. 3:20), and this series reads them with Peter's second letter and Jude as the angels who sinned before the flood and are "reserved for judgment" (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). And the gospel "preached also to those who are dead" (1 Pet. 4:6) was preached to men who heard it while they lived and have since died.

The universalist and the Word of the Kingdom teacher can sit down over a Greek lexicon and agree on a great deal. They part at the end of the ages, over whether the separation that Scripture calls the second death ever ends. Same vocabulary, different dictionaries, and here the difference decides how the story ends.

Why It Matters

Every road in Part Two turns at a question this series has already answered, and every one of them turns by moving something out of its place. The Word of Faith movement moves the reward out of "that Day" (2 Tim. 4:8) and into this life. The New Apostolic Reformation moves the revealing of the sons out of the redemption of the body (Rom. 8:23) and into a revival, and the kingdom out of the hands of the God who sets it up (Dan. 2:44) and into the hands of the Church. The Hebrew Roots and Two-House teachings move the Gentile Christian out of his heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1) and into Israel's earthly portion. And universalism moves the turning point of a person's life out of this life (Heb. 9:27) and into the ages after it.

Those are exactly the places a Word of the Kingdom reader is most likely to be confused, because they're the places these movements borrow this series' language. Overcomers, sons, reward, reign, Israel's promises, *aionios* as age-lasting: every one of those appears in at least one movement above, meaning something this series doesn't teach. A reader who has only the words can't tell them apart. A reader who knows *when* Scripture places each thing, and *who* it gives it to, can.

Conclusion to Paper 12

This paper set out to map where other roads leave the main one, and it found them leaving at six places. In Part One they split at the foundations: who God is, what counts as His word, and whose name "Christ" is. In Part Two they split closer to home: the timing of the kingdom, the identity of Israel, and the end of the ages. Some of those roads run beside this one for a long stretch. The Christadelphians expect a literal reign from Jerusalem; the Witnesses count the 144,000 as a literal number; Adventists look for Christ to return before the thousand years; Pentecostals wait for Him with this series; universalists read *aionios* the way this series reads it. Agreement on a conclusion is real agreement, and it isn't agreement on a route.

The twelve papers of this series have been one long exercise in checking the route. Each has set a teaching, this series' own included, beside the Scripture it claims and asked whether the text says what the teaching says. That's the test this paper has applied to every movement it surveyed, and it's the test this series asks its own readers to apply to it: "line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little" (Isa. 28:10), searching "the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Same vocabulary, different dictionaries. The way to know which dictionary is right is to open the Book that wrote the words.

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Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.