They Wanted Revival

Tolstoy's Didache, Scofield's Footnotes, and the Church Facing Gaza

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Author’s Note

I spent twenty years in Pentecostal churches. The last church I attended belonged to the Holiness movement. The first-person church scenes in this book are literary composites drawn from that experience and from the patterns I have described. Their rooms, conversations, unnamed people, order of events, and some of the narrator’s private actions and thoughts are shaped for the argument. No such scene should be read as a transcript of an identifiable congregation. The judgment about the churches I knew is mine, and so is the responsibility for making it fairly.

The historical figures and published texts are treated differently. The Didache, Tolstoy’s writings, Scofield’s editions, and the public record of the war in Gaza are matters for evidence. I distinguish a text’s words from an interpreter’s conclusions and a political movement’s actions from the intentions of every person associated with it. I call what has happened in Gaza genocide as a moral judgment, while describing the differing legal findings and the status of proceedings as of September 2026. The evidence ledger at the end identifies what the book can document, what it argues, and what it cannot establish.

My criticism of Christian Zionism is a criticism of a theology and its political uses. It is not an accusation against Jews as a people. Jewish civilians and Palestinian civilians have equal claim on a Christian conscience. The massacre and captivity of Israeli civilians do not become acceptable because a Christian opposes Israel’s conduct in Gaza; the killing and deprivation of Palestinian civilians do not become acceptable because a Christian fears antisemitism. The text must be read with both truths in view.

The Didache is an early Christian teaching manual outside the New Testament canon. It does not replace Scripture in this book. I use it as a witness to what an ancient Christian community expected its members and teachers to do. Tolstoy encountered it before Scofield’s reference Bible appeared. He and Scofield did not debate one another. I put their ways of guiding readers into conversation because their different priorities remain alive in churches now. Nor do I adopt every conclusion Tolstoy reached. His argument for enemy-love and against the church’s blessing of state violence is central here; the full Didache also tests his selective reading of early Christianity.

Prologue: The Jesus Face and the Two Books

The room in my memory is assembled from many rooms. A few people arrive early and stand in the aisle talking. One asks after a neighbor's surgery. Another knows whose car is failing and who might be able to fix it. By the time the first song begins, the ordinary burdens of the week have been brought inside with the people who carry them. The lights soften. The words appear on a screen. Hands rise, some hesitantly, some at once. I know what it feels like when a congregation sings long enough to believe that something beyond itself is answering.

For twenty years I worshiped in Pentecostal churches. My last church belonged to the Holiness movement. I am not describing a religious species observed through glass. These churches gave me prayer, company, and acts of practical kindness. If a member fell ill, someone visited. If a family had trouble buying food, another family might quietly help. People who had little made room for one another. Any account that cannot acknowledge this goodness will be unable to explain why the failures I witnessed still matter to me.

Near the end of the service, the pastor in this composite room turns to events in the Holy Land. There is a change in vocabulary without much change in feeling. We were asking God to heal a person we know. Now we are asking God to bless Israel. Someone speaks of the last days. The congregation knows the cadence of those words. The names on a map, the promises to Abraham, the return of Christ, and a modern government have been joined so often in our hearing that they seem to belong to one sentence. We can say it without stopping to ask which part comes from the biblical text, which part comes from an interpretation of it, and which part comes from the evening news.

Later, in the small conversations around the door, the subject persists. What about the people living under bombardment? What about Christians among the Palestinians? The questions need not come from an outsider. A person inside the church might ask them because a person inside the church has been taught that Jesus cares about children, enemies, strangers, and the hungry. A gentle answer may follow. We should pray for everyone. God is in control. The prophecies will unfold. Each sentence can contain truth. Together they can also close the inquiry before it has begun.

I have called that expression the Jesus face. It is the look of compassion that allows an uncomfortable fact to pass through a conversation without changing its conclusions. I have seen others wear it. I have felt the impulse to wear it myself. A question about a distant family arrives just as the congregation is recovering its familiar peace. The face promises that I can remain kind, retain the warmth of the room, and let the question go. It makes avoidance appear merciful.

They wanted revival. I wanted it too. We used that word for crowded evenings, tears at the altar, a new expectancy in prayer, a preacher whose voice could hold a room, and sometimes a real change in a person's life. I do not despise any of these things. But a congregation can become practiced at recognizing an atmosphere and remain unpracticed at examining a claim. It can learn to expect the Spirit to move while treating its inherited account of world events as settled. The religious excitement is then genuine as experience and thin as judgment. The problem begins when the feeling of certainty is mistaken for the work of understanding.

Scofield's reference Bible supplied one unusually effective way for a Christian to feel that certainty. Cyrus Ingerson Scofield placed a network of explanatory notes, headings, summaries, and cross-references alongside the biblical text. The verses and the notes did not have the same origin or authority, but they met the eye on the same page. Generations of readers learned an account of dispensations, Israel, the church, and the end of history through that arrangement. Some studied it carefully. Others inherited its conclusions

from pastors, broadcasters, prophecy conferences, and fellow believers who no longer remembered where the conclusions began. A sentence spoken in a church about the Holy Land might have traveled through several mouths before arriving there. It could still bear the shape of a footnote.

This book follows that journey from the annotated page into the churches I knew and into the moral crisis of Gaza. It asks whether a theology can prepare believers to excuse what they would condemn if it happened to people nearby. It asks what responsibility belongs to Christians whose political support is mediated by a prophecy scheme. Another witness can test the journey: a small, early Christian text that begins by asking which way of life a disciple will walk.

The Didache opens with two ways, one of life and one of death. Its commands include love of God and neighbor, prayer for enemies, generosity, truthfulness, restraint, and care for people in need. It proceeds to baptism, fasting, prayer, thanksgiving over a meal, the testing of traveling teachers, the appointment of local leaders, and watchfulness for the Lord’s coming. Its communities were neither free of religious order nor indifferent to the future. They had to decide whether the person claiming spiritual authority lived as a faithful teacher, whether a stranger would be welcomed without allowing an exploiter to take over a household, and whether worshipers would reconcile before sharing bread. Their expectation of an end did not release them from their obligations in the present.

For centuries the complete Greek text was unavailable to modern readers. Philotheos Bryennios found it in a manuscript and published it in 1883. Leo Tolstoy encountered it soon afterward. He had already turned to the commands of Jesus as the center of a livable faith and had become convinced that a church allied to coercive power had betrayed them. The Didache confirmed something he wanted ordinary Christians to see: faith had to be walked. He made his own rendering after consulting Greek, Russian, and German editions, wrote an introduction and an afterword, and pressed readers to take the Way of Life seriously.

Tolstoy deserves no halo of interpretive neutrality. He gave special weight to the opening moral chapters and treated much of what followed as the arrangements of a Christian community. His reading makes baptism, the meal, church office, and the text’s concluding apocalypse harder to hear on their own terms. Scofield too guided readers, though by a different method. The comparison therefore cannot rest on a simple story of one man merely repeating Jesus while another man merely adding to him. Both made choices about emphasis and authority. The ancient text and the New Testament must be allowed to question those choices.

I nevertheless find myself with Tolstoy when he demands that we obey what Jesus says about our enemies. The demand interrupts the easy movement from religious conviction to permission for state violence. It does not tell me exactly how a cabinet, an army, or a court should resolve every danger. It tells me that a Christian may not place a government beyond the reach of the command to love. If a child is hungry or a civilian is held captive, neither person becomes less real because a believer has a view of the last days. Prayer does not erase the obligation to learn what is being done and to judge it truthfully.

The two books in this story are not physically side by side in that composite sanctuary. One is a Bible with notes that helped shape an American way of anticipating history. The other is a brief manual from an early Christian community, brought back into modern argument through a Russian writer who believed the churches had learned to admire Christ without obeying him. Both have been edited, transmitted, and interpreted. The real question is what their readers carry out of the room.

When the service ends, I can imagine the familiar good things: someone opening a door for an older member, a ride offered, a meal planned for a neighbor, two people lingering to pray. I can also imagine a conversation about Gaza ending in the words that God is in control. What would change if the tenderness

shown to a nearby family were allowed to govern that conversation too? What would revival mean if it made us able to keep looking at the people whom our theology had taught us to overlook?

The room empties slowly. The music is over. The question follows us home.

Part I: How Reading Became Authority

Chapter 1: The Manuscript Returns

The little book arrived in the nineteenth century after a long absence from the ordinary library of Christians. Its first sentence did not ask the reader to identify the year of Christ's return or determine which nation would occupy a strip of land. It announced two ways, one of life and one of death. The distance between the two was great. The way of life began with love of God and neighbor, and then made the neighbor difficult to confine: bless the one who curses you, pray for the one who persecutes you, give without calculating the return. It was a Christian document with an unmistakable memory of Jewish moral teaching. It did not allow an interested reader to separate the worship of God from the treatment of a human being.

The text is now called the *Didache*, a Greek word meaning teaching. It also bears a longer title identifying it as the Lord's teaching through the twelve apostles to the nations. We should not take that title as a modern author's signature. The work is anonymous. Its date, composition, and place of origin remain subjects of scholarly argument. Parts may preserve practices from a very early Jewish-Christian setting; the surviving book may have taken shape in stages. It is early enough to bring us close to communities still learning how to teach converts, pray together, feed travelers, and recognize a trustworthy prophet. It is not a stenographic transcript of a meeting of the Twelve. Its age makes it valuable, not infallible.

For centuries Christian writers had known or mentioned a work by this name. Eusebius discussed it among writings outside the acknowledged New Testament; Athanasius placed it among works useful for instruction but distinct from the canonical books. Copies and echoes in other church orders preserved portions of its teaching. The complete Greek text, however, was unavailable to most modern readers until a codex emerged from the library of the Jerusalem patriarchate's monastery of the Holy Sepulchre in Constantinople. The manuscript had been copied in 1056 by a scribe who called himself Leon. It carried, alongside the *Didache*, writings attributed to Clement, Barnabas, and Ignatius. Its contents belonged to the complicated memory of early Christianity, not to a single denominational library.

Philotheos Bryennios examined that codex in 1873. He first published its letters of Clement. In 1883 he published the Greek *Didache*, setting readers across Europe to work on what the small book meant. The distinction between finding the codex and issuing the edition is worth keeping. It would be easy to compress the story to "a bishop discovered the *Didache* in 1883." The text entered public scholarship then, but Bryennios had encountered the manuscript a decade earlier. The distinction matters more still because Tolstoy later made the text famous in his own circle. Tolstoy did not discover it in a monastery. He received a text already recovered and published by someone else.

I cannot stand in Bryennios's library and reproduce his first recognition. No record allows me to narrate the movement of his fingers over the page or the thought that crossed his mind. I can imagine the kind of surprise a scholar experiences when a title known from old references becomes a text one can actually read, but imagination should not be dressed as testimony. The certain event is substantial enough. After centuries in which Christians had discussed what their earliest communities might have looked like, here was a concise ancient instruction for people learning to live together under the teaching of Jesus.

The book is only sixteen short chapters. The first section sets out the two ways. It joins the commands to love God and neighbor to teachings recognizable from the Sermon on the Mount. The second moves among baptism, fasting, prayer, thanksgiving over cup and bread, hospitality for travelers, discernment of apostles

and prophets, and the appointment of bishops and deacons. The final chapter urges watchfulness for the Lord's coming. A community that read the whole work could not reasonably say that Christian life was only a matter of ethical maxims. Nor could it say that expectation of the end displaced ethics, worship, or the duties of hospitality. The sections live beside one another. A teacher claiming to speak in the Spirit must be judged by conduct. A community praying for God's kingdom still has to feed the person who arrived at the door.

I am drawn first to its Jewish inheritance. The formula "two ways" belongs to a wider world of biblical instruction, not to a Christian invention ex nihilo. Deuteronomy sets life and death before Israel. Wisdom literature asks readers to choose a path and understand where it leads. The *Didache*'s commandments against murder, theft, false witness, and coveting carry the moral grammar of Torah. The language of prayer and gathered community does not put the Jewish people behind the Christian text as discarded scaffolding. It reminds us that the first followers of Jesus received their moral imagination from Israel's Scriptures. Even if scholars differ over the exact textual sources of the two-ways section, the kinship is visible on the page.

That kinship cuts against a lazy Christian use of the *Didache*. We cannot enlist it to say that authentic Christianity simply escaped Jewish religion, or that Jewish people were left with law while Christians discovered love. The very commands that Tolstoy found liberating came through a tradition formed among Jews. The first Christians were not a people who had never heard of Israel until a prophecy teacher introduced them to a future timetable. Jesus, his apostles, and the communities that taught the way of life inhabited Jewish Scripture. To ask how Christians should read Israel's promises is necessary. To detach the command to love from its Jewish home is a betrayal of the inquiry before it begins.

The form of the text also unsettles us. It is not a systematic treatise on justification, church-state relations, or the metaphysics of God. It speaks in imperatives: do not turn your hand back when it is time to give; do not hate a person; make peace between opponents. Its instruction about anger treats the small interior movement as the beginning of a grave public wrong. Its counsel about money refuses to leave greed safely inside a person's private account. Then it turns to shared practices. Water, food, fasting, thanksgiving, and traveling teachers are material realities. A church cannot claim fidelity to the *Didache* merely by admiring its simplicity. It has to ask how it handles actual people and goods.

The ancient text is not uncomplicated. It includes instructions about servants and masters that a modern reader must face critically. Its exact relationship to New Testament writings is disputed. Whether a phrase depends on Matthew, shares a tradition Matthew also used, or was adapted in a later layer cannot always be settled. The two-ways teaching has parallels beyond the Christian setting, including the *Epistle of Barnabas*. Dating the whole book to the lifetime of the original apostles because one passage sounds early would exceed the evidence. We can let the text be early and startling without making every sentence a transparent photograph of the first generation. An honest attempt at recovery must resist the same certainty I will question in Scofield's later apparatus.

One detail from the section on travelers has remained with me. The text welcomes an apostle and then imposes limits on the visitor's stay and demands. A person who remains too long or asks for money in the wrong manner gives the community reason to doubt his claim. Hospitality and suspicion of exploitation appear in the same instruction. The community has to open its house, but it must not surrender judgment to charisma. This is neither cynicism nor gullibility. It is an early attempt to let generosity and discernment correct one another.

There is a modern church question in that detail. What would happen if a congregation treated a successful speaker's demand for loyalty, money, or exemption from criticism as a reason to examine his life? I have been in rooms where a visiting teacher could announce a startling proposition with a practiced voice, and the room's energy would carry it further than the evidence. The *Didache* asks the hearers to notice what the claimant does. I do not imply that its rules can be transplanted unchanged into a Kansas church. I mean that the ancient community took responsibility for testing teachers. It did not suppose that spiritual language relieved it of that task.

The little book also resists the claim that an ethics of the present implies no expectation of Christ's return. Its final chapter warns readers to watch. The warning is concrete: lamps, gathering, testing, and perseverance. It does not supply a calendar of nations. It does not identify a modern war as the decisive clue. It does not instruct believers to relax their judgment of a ruler because an event seems to advance a prophetic sequence. Watchfulness is a moral posture as much as an expectation. A person waiting for the Lord cannot simply leave the hungry outside because the end may be near. The final chapter belongs to the same book that taught love of enemy at its beginning.

This matters for our comparison. Scofield did not invent the Christian hope of a future. Tolstoy did not invent the insistence that faith be lived. The *Didache* places future and practice within one small frame. It offers a test to both men. Tolstoy will be drawn to the opening chapters and inclined to treat the rest as a later arrangement, less decisive for salvation. Scofield will develop an elaborate scheme of dispensations and prophetic sequence while saying less to the reader, at the moment of annotation, about whether the scheme makes love of enemies more possible. Neither man can claim the entire document merely because some part serves his purpose.

We should be careful with another contrast. A handbook from an early community does not automatically settle what a modern government should do about a border, nor does a rule for greeting travelers supply a military strategy. It can, however, test the kind of person the church becomes while it judges those questions. If a church believes a future promise demands contemporary advocacy, the *Didache* still asks it to avoid hatred, false speech, and an eager hand extended to receive. If a church invokes the end of history, the *Didache* still asks whether it can distinguish a prophet's words from a prophet's conduct. These are conditions of Christian judgment, not substitutes for studying events.

I find the manuscript's return almost unbearably timely, although I do not mean that Bryennios found it for our century. It arrived in the same broad era in which prophecy conferences and printed Bibles would make a different sort of Christian reading increasingly influential. One small book made early conduct newly visible. Another large book, not yet composed, would put a modern interpretive scheme under the ancient biblical page. Their readers would inherit different habits. The contrast is a historical opportunity for us, not a claim that nineteenth-century people confronted the exact crisis we confront now.

A science background makes me alert to what an instrument permits us to see. The recovery of a manuscript added data to the history of Christian practice. It did not dictate one model of Christian origins. A textual witness has provenance, gaps, uncertain layers, and a history of transmission. It also has the stubborn power of a real object: one cannot simply arrange the first communities to match a preferred denominational story once their instruction is in front of us. We can disagree about how much weight to give the *Didache*. We cannot honestly pretend it says only what our church said last Sunday.

Its first readers, whoever they were, had to be taught to choose the way of life. That means the way was not automatic even for believers close to Christian beginnings. Their teachers knew the danger of self-deception, predatory prophets, money, division, and fear. It would be romantic to say that the early

community already did everything it taught. A rule of life can record the wrongs a community found hard to resist. That makes the text more rather than less useful to me. The twenty-first-century church can read it as an indictment of its weakness without imagining that an earlier church had no weakness of its own.

The prayers over a cup and over broken bread give the reader another reason to resist pulling the text away from Israel. They thank God for a holy vine of David and for life and knowledge made known through Jesus. The image of the scattered grain gathered into one loaf becomes a prayer that the church be gathered from the ends of the earth. The language does not sound like a detached Greco-Roman philosophy of kindness. It remembers David and speaks of a gathered people. The text is Christian, but its Christianity is intelligible through Jewish Scripture. A future church should have been able to learn from it that gratitude for Israel's gift to the world and welcome to Gentiles were not rival emotions.

The order of the prayers also cautions us against using the *Didache* to manufacture a complete history of the Eucharist. Its cup-and-bread language differs from the familiar narrative order in some New Testament passages, and it does not repeat every word a later liturgy might regard as central. Some scholars have drawn large conclusions from the difference. Perhaps the prayers preserve an early practice, perhaps they served a setting somewhat different from the later formal Eucharist, and perhaps some details have been lost in transmission. The record does not give permission to reconstruct the entire worship of the first Christian generation from sixteen chapters. It does give permission to notice that a community's meals and thanksgiving belonged to its teaching.

Chapter seven gives baptismal instructions with a practical flexibility I find striking. Living water is preferred. If that is unavailable, other water may be used; if immersion in sufficient water cannot be had, water may be poured. The text attends to a real community's circumstances rather than making a symbol dependent on the perfect local landscape. Yet the community fasts and prepares. Flexibility is paired with seriousness. This is an instructive combination for Christians who can become more energetic about defining the precise form of a practice than about asking whom their practice welcomes. The early teachers evidently cared about forms. They also cared that a person could enter the community when ideal conditions were absent.

These examples come from chapters Tolstoy placed at the edge of his account. I do not introduce them to rebuke him for caring about the Sermon on the Mount. I introduce them because the strongest version of his moral claim needs a body. A command to share goods needs a gathered community that can know who is hungry. A command to love the stranger needs a practice of hospitality that can receive an actual stranger. A command to test spiritual speech needs procedures of communal judgment and the humility to acknowledge a mistaken judgment. The prayer for the church to be gathered across the earth is not an escape from the immediate neighbor. It enlarges the table at which the neighbor might be recognized.

One of the small ironies of modern disputes about "primitive Christianity" is how frequently a primitive church is imagined in the image of the present polemicist. The anti-institutional reader finds a church of spontaneous morals. The ritualist finds an early liturgy. The prophecy enthusiast finds end-time expectation. All those elements can be found in the *Didache*, with qualifications. The book is short enough to read in one sitting, and that makes selective appeals especially unnecessary. We can watch its moral and communal practices correct each other. A church that wants the ancient text's prestige should accept the discomfort of its whole sequence.

The last chapter's expectation also ends without the satisfying precision a modern chart would provide. It warns of deception, trial, signs, and the Lord's coming. The words are severe, and I cannot turn them into a bland instruction to be nice. Their severity presses the community to remain faithful in the face of fear. But

the text does not tell a hearer to treat contemporary violence as enjoyable confirmation that a schedule is on time. Its practical answer to uncertainty is vigilance among people who have already been told how to live. The way of life is not canceled when the world becomes frightening.

A reader who wants to locate the *Didache* exactly in relation to Judaism should resist an easy answer. The two-ways form has Jewish analogues, and the commandments plainly draw on Israel's moral world. But the received Greek text is addressed through Jesus's teaching and contains specifically Christian prayers and practices. We cannot simply assign one section to a pure Jewish source and another to a pure Christian editor without arguing for the proposed layers. The interaction is itself historically revealing. The early church did not learn to obey Jesus by first forgetting the law and prophets. It adapted inherited practices within a community confessing him.

This point has contemporary stakes. Some Christian defenses of the Jewish people praise the Hebrew Bible's promises but speak of Palestinian Christians as though they were strangers to those Scriptures. Some arguments against Christian Zionism, on the other hand, speak as though the Jewish origins of the Gospel can be ignored now that Gentiles have joined the church. The *Didache* exposes both impoverishments. The name of David sounds in its thanksgiving; Gentile inclusion sounds in its long title and prayer for a gathered church. A Christian reader cannot isolate one without reducing the other. Precisely because this ancient document is not a modern political brief, it can loosen the grip of a political binary on our reading.

There is no special virtue in the age of a text if we use its age to stop thinking. The *Didache* can contradict a cherished story of early Christian life, and it can be misread through another cherished story. Its return means that we have another witness to read, not a final court of appeal replacing the New Testament. I will refer to it often, sometimes agreeing with Tolstoy and sometimes asking him to read further. The manuscript gives the book a standard of practical scrutiny: when an interpretation of God's promise is offered, what kind of common life does it permit, and whose face is still visible when the interpreter is finished?

The manuscript returned through the work of an Orthodox scholar. It traveled in editions, translations, arguments, and inexpensive publications. Tolstoy encountered it after his own long revolt against a Christianity he thought unable to take Jesus seriously. He saw, in the opening five chapters, the possibility of a livable Gospel addressed to ordinary people. To understand why the text mattered so much to him, we must first understand the question he brought to it. It was the question of a man with fame, property, a family, and a growing conviction that he had learned to call his life meaningful without knowing how to live it.

Chapter 2: Tolstoy’s Search for a Livable Gospel

The famous novelist did not come to the *Didache* as a neutral antiquarian. He had already written *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. His reputation could fill a room, but reputation had not answered his question about death. In *A Confession*, he described a crisis in which work, family, and success no longer seemed able to tell him why to continue living. He sought answers in philosophy and science and found that neither, as he understood them, dissolved the terror of finitude. Then he looked at the faith of people whose lives did not enjoy the protection his own position gave him. This movement from explanation to life was the hinge of his religious search.

It is tempting to tell that story too smoothly. A novelist despairs; a peasant believes; the novelist discovers Christianity; his life changes. Tolstoy himself wrote with the force of such an arc, but his later conduct did not resolve every contradiction. He owned an estate, quarreled with his family about property and publishing, and had to live inside relationships that could not be simplified into a parable of renunciation. The point is not to withhold interest until a reformer becomes perfectly consistent. The point is to hear what he thought the Gospel demanded while remembering that he was one of the people addressed by it.

His crisis sharpened a particular question: did Christianity ask for assent to a set of propositions that could leave social life essentially intact, or did it describe a way of living? Tolstoy came to think that Jesus’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount had been treated as an impossible ideal so the ordinary machinery of coercion could continue. A person could call Jesus Lord, go to church, enlist in an army, bless an execution, accumulate property, and explain that the hard sayings were beautiful in spirit but impractical as commands. Tolstoy refused the exemption. If Jesus said not to retaliate, perhaps he meant it.

That refusal took a definite form in *What I Believe*, also translated as *My Religion*. Tolstoy organized much of his Christian reasoning around the commands in Matthew 5: do not nurse anger, do not cultivate lust, do not swear oaths, do not answer evil with violence, love enemies. He read them as directions for action by ordinary human beings. The church’s accommodation to courts, armies, and state power looked to him like an elaborate explanation for disobedience. In *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, a later work, he widened that argument into a critique of institutions that claim Christian allegiance while requiring violence. We must keep the chronology straight: the *Didache* came to him in 1885, after the main turn toward the Sermon on the Mount had already occurred. It confirmed and served a search; it did not create the search from nothing.

I agree with the force of his challenge. In my churches, it was possible to be impressively certain about a future tribulation while remaining vague about the meaning of loving an enemy today. We heard Jesus’s command, and then we heard a practical voice explain that it could not really govern a nation, a household, or a political argument. Some of those qualifications involved real moral dilemmas. Protecting a victim from an attacker is not the same problem as a private revenge. Tolstoy did not make every dilemma disappear by refusing violence. Yet when Christians leap from the existence of a hard case to the conclusion that Jesus’s words have no public claim, the leap deserves to be named. Tolstoy made it uncomfortable to leap.

He was neither the first Christian to insist on peace nor the only reader to draw this conclusion from the Gospel. Early Christian writers, Anabaptists, Quakers, and other traditions had argued about nonresistance and the church’s relation to the state. Tolstoy did not inherit all of their theology or ecclesial practice, and one should not simply assimilate him to them. His contribution was to put the question in prose that refused

a safe distance: what does one do tomorrow morning if one has understood Jesus? He treated the answer as a challenge to his own position as a landowner as well as to the government's authority.

There is an attraction in this clarity for a person who has spent years in revival meetings. An altar call can ask for an immediate response and then leave the content of a changed life underdeveloped. Tolstoy asks for an immediate response that grows teeth. Reconcile with the person you have injured. Refuse to bless violence merely because a state performs it. Ask what your possessions cost other people. Attend to someone beyond the household of those you already love. None of these acts requires a prophecy chart. None is easy. His simplicity concerns the intelligibility of the instruction, not the ease of obeying it.

The word *livable* needs care. Tolstoy did not mean a religion adjusted to what an affluent society finds comfortable. He meant a teaching that could be enacted in human life instead of preserved as a ceremonial ideal whose practice is perpetually deferred. The distinction can be missed by a critic who answers, "People cannot live like that." Tolstoy heard that objection as the very escape the Gospel closes. If I say loving an enemy is unrealistic, am I reporting a limitation of human nature, or defending a way of life I do not intend to question? The answer can vary with the case. It cannot be given responsibly without examining the case.

Tolstoy had already made an editorial intervention of his own in *The Gospel in Brief*. He assembled the Gospel narrative so that the teaching he believed central could be read with fewer obstacles from conventional church explanations. The resulting work can bring a neglected imperative sharply into view. It can also make the editor's judgment about what is essential feel like the Gospel's own unmediated voice. This is why I cannot simply replace Scofield's annotated Bible with Tolstoy's arranged Gospel as an answer to the problem of authority. I need Tolstoy's challenge to my conscience, but I also need to see the choices by which he placed that challenge before me.

His approach to Scripture was also selective, and I do not share it without reservation. He often subordinated doctrines and texts he judged inconsistent with the teaching he reconstructed from Jesus's commands. The creed, sacramental life, and apostolic interpretation of Christ did not have for him the authority they hold for many Christians, including me. A reader may agree with his demand for practiced enemy-love while finding his account of Christ, the resurrection, and the church incomplete. Agreement does not require making him a new pope of simplicity. In fact, we shall need the whole *Didache* precisely because its baptismal, eucharistic, communal, and apocalyptic chapters complicate his favored portrait.

That complication is fruitful rather than embarrassing. A Christian who opposes Scofield's separation of Israel and church might be tempted to borrow Tolstoy's ethics and bypass the theological work. But the biblical promises to Abraham, Paul's argument about Gentiles and Jews, and the future hope of Revelation do not vanish because one has resolved to be kind. Tolstoy can turn us toward what Jesus commands; he cannot by himself finish every exegesis this book needs. The choice is not between a moralist with no doctrine and a prophet of timetables with no morals. The church must bring its teachings about God, Christ, Israel, and the end under the discipline of love and truth together.

Tolstoy's Russia also matters. The established church and the imperial state had long been entangled. Ritual and national identity could identify a person as Christian while the machinery of punishment and war remained normal. Tolstoy's critique grew in that setting. We should not imagine his exact social conditions replicated in Kansas. Yet the structural question travels: what happens when a church's loyalty to a nation changes what it is able to hear from Jesus? A Russian officer and an American voter occupy different roles. Each can develop a religious explanation for why the enemy is exempt from the neighbor's claim.

I have heard the rejoinder that Jesus did not tell states to turn the other cheek. The words in Matthew are addressed to disciples, and the question of state action cannot be settled merely by substituting the word *government* for *you*. That is a fair caution about interpretation. It is also a weak excuse if it ends the conversation. Christians compose churches, vote, lobby, enlist, pay taxes, teach children, bless officials, and sometimes hold office. They cannot make their discipleship vanish at the threshold of political participation. Tolstoy presses on the point at which the believer who personally disavows hatred helps maintain a system of violence without asking how personal discipleship should bear on it.

Nor should his critique be reduced to an accusation that every person in uniform lacks faith. A good argument must recognize conflicting duties and the possibility of conscientious disagreement. Tolstoy's absolutism is a hard question for me, not a magic answer. What I can say is that a church that cannot bear to discuss his question is in trouble. If it can discuss each graphic detail of an end-times scenario and cannot discuss how Jesus's command to love an enemy constrains its public speech, its appetite for biblical detail has become selective.

An uncharitable critic can object that Tolstoy's own family suffered from the distance between his ideals and his responsibilities. That history should be studied honestly. He cannot be excused from ordinary obligations by a grand theory of self-denial; one can injure a spouse and children while imagining one is giving everything to humanity. The possibility cautions this book against heroic biography. It also sharpens Tolstoy's own principle. The neighbor is not an abstraction whose distant need cancels the duties of the person nearest the table. Moral consistency must be examined at both distances. In Part V, when the book imagines a church gathered at a household table, this tension will matter.

A science education gave me another way to recognize what disturbed him. When a theory survives every contrary observation by adding an exception, one has to ask whether it is still illuminating the evidence. Christian teaching can use necessary distinctions; Jesus's words need interpretation. But an interpretation that always converts an imperative into an aspiration, and always calls the resulting inaction faithful, protects itself from correction. Tolstoy demanded that we allow the command to test the life. If Christians say the teaching works, then life must supply some evidence of the work.

His conflict with the church was not merely a temperamental hostility to priests. He thought a deep reversal had occurred. Christianity had become capable of blessing what Jesus forbade and of regarding obedience as heresy. Others judged his account of the church historically and theologically one-sided. The arguments require more than a slogan. Still, a believer need not adopt his entire history of doctrine to ask whether an institution profits by making hard commands remote. A sermon can turn Jesus into a revered exception to the practices it urges on the congregation. I have heard both the reverence and the exemption in the same hour.

Tolstoy's conversion language can be strange to readers who expect a single moment at an altar. He moved through doubt, close reading, revisions, and quarrels. He did not submit a finished formula and stop thinking. The *Didache* reached him while the question was alive: can the teaching of Christ be placed before ordinary readers in a form that tells them how to walk? A brief ancient handbook had obvious appeal. Its first words did not ask permission from a theological institution to make their demand. One can picture Tolstoy recognizing in the contrast of life and death the form of the choice he had tried to articulate for years. The picture is an interpretation of his writings, not a recovered private instant.

To see the exact shape of Tolstoy's disagreement, consider the command about oaths. A modern Christian may read "do not swear" and decide that Jesus is forbidding manipulative speech but allowing a court oath under proper conditions. Tolstoy regarded the ordinary oath of allegiance as a deeper concession: it hands

one’s future action to a power that may order one to do what Christ forbids. His conclusion can be challenged on exegetical grounds. Yet it draws out an ethical fact easily missed in a sermon about private honesty. A promise to obey an institution is a moral act, especially if the institution may demand violence. One cannot safely confine the passage to the sincerity of conversational words without asking what the public oath actually commits a person to do.

Likewise, when he read the instruction to go an extra mile, he did not see a strategy for making an oppressor feel guilty, or a pleasant metaphor for exceeding customer expectations. Roman coercion lies behind the picture in Matthew. The point is not that every second mile under every government is identical. It is that Jesus addressed disciples whose lives were subject to other people’s power, and he did not permit the stronger party’s coercion to define the whole meaning of their response. A congregation surrounded by its own country’s power can easily forget that the Gospel was spoken from beneath an empire. Tolstoy’s Russian confrontation with imperial institutions helped him hear an uncomfortable public edge in the words.

There are also questions his teaching leaves open. If a violent man attacks a child, can the adult beside the child use force to prevent him? If a community refuses military defense, what duty does it owe those who bear the consequences of its refusal? A church should not silence these questions by calling them mere excuses. Neither should it use the hardest imaginable case to justify indifference to violence in easier cases. The moral life is not served by pretending every situation is the same. Tolstoy’s challenge is strongest when it forces a Christian to state exactly why a proposed exception is necessary, what harm it may cause, and whether love of enemy still constrains the manner of action.

I can bring that question into my own setting without claiming that a Russian text tells a Kansas church how to vote. Suppose a person in the pew says that compassion for children on both sides requires an immediate end to bombardment. Another says that stopping it would expose families to a grave threat. The disagreement may involve intelligence, law, military judgment, and memories of violence. A pastor does not resolve it by repeating “God is in control.” Tolstoy would make each speaker ask which human beings have disappeared inside his preferred conclusion. The command to love enemies does not eliminate the need to learn the facts. It makes accurate facts more urgent because the enemy’s life is at stake.

There is a spiritual cost to treating Jesus’s commands as inaccessible heroism. The believer learns to admire someone else’s perfection and to expect little from the congregation’s actual habits. In that setting revival can become an interval of feeling whose proof is another interval of feeling. Tolstoy asks for a different kind of evidence. Do neighbors who quarrel learn to reconcile? Does a person who has money recognize the person who lacks it? Can the congregation speak truthfully about violence even when truth unsettles its alliances? A single act will not certify a church as the kingdom of God. A pattern of action can reveal what its teaching has trained people to notice.

The personal contradiction in Tolstoy’s life is therefore more than an opponent’s convenient objection. It tests what it means to ask others to live a teaching one finds almost impossible oneself. He could have softened the demand to protect his standing. He could also have turned the demand into a weapon against a family whose needs resisted his ideal. I take both dangers seriously. The value of his work lies partly in its refusal to define the Christian life by the successes of its most eloquent advocate. The Gospel either calls its advocate to account or it becomes his property. We can let Tolstoy’s own failures be examined under the same command he applied to churches and governments.

His next action was practical. He worked on a Russian rendering and an accompanying explanation intended for a broad readership. The path from an ancient Greek manuscript to a Russian pamphlet passes

through translation, editorial choice, correspondence, censorship, and the publishing channels of the day. That path is as important for understanding Tolstoy as paper and Oxford will be for understanding Scofield. Neither man simply delivered an unmediated voice from antiquity. Each handled an old text and chose what a reader would see first. The question of how authority is acquired begins there.

Chapter 3: Tolstoy Receives the Didache

In a letter to his wife from January 1885, Tolstoy reported that he had begun work on the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. He said it absorbed him and could become a popular book of great importance. That is a useful piece of evidence because it catches the undertaking before its later admirers turn it into a settled emblem of Tolstoyan Christianity. He was working, revising, and imagining an audience. In February he told Vladimir Chertkov that he was correcting the teaching and would send it. What eventually appeared was a deliberate intervention in what ordinary readers might learn from an ancient text.

The Russian scholar Konstantin Popov had already translated and discussed the *Didache* in the scholarly environment opened by Bryennios's edition. Tolstoy could read the Greek and consulted Russian and German renderings. His undertaking is best described as a new rendering and adaptation, informed by these materials, with his own preface and postscript. It was printed without his name in the periodical *Detskaia pomoshch* in May 1885. Editorial records and correspondence help recover that history. It is inaccurate to say that Tolstoy found the manuscript or published the first text of the *Didache*. It is equally inadequate to say he merely repeated another translator. He actively selected, shaped, and interpreted what his audience would receive.

The editions of Tolstoy's own work carry a small chronological trap. His English-translated preface, reflecting his compressed account, says that Bryennios discovered and printed the teaching in 1883. The codex had in fact been found in 1873, and the *Didache* itself was printed in 1883. Some notes to Russian editions give still another date in describing when the work became known. A modern author should not repair the discrepancy by pretending Tolstoy had access to an archival chronology he did not use. The fair statement is that his pamphlet was written in the first burst of public response to Bryennios's edition and that the pamphlet's historical introduction compresses discovery and publication. I correct the date as a fact while taking his purpose seriously.

The chronology also shows how quickly an ancient text could become a contested modern possession. Two years after the Greek edition, a Russian novelist was addressing readers who would never see the codex. An Orthodox scholar could interpret the work's prayers, offices, and relation to the church; Tolstoy could emphasize the moral instruction that made later accommodations look false. The dispute was not simply whether the manuscript was genuine. It was over which part of a complex early Christian witness should judge nineteenth-century Christianity. That is why the mere word *rediscovery* is too small for Tolstoy's role and too large for his claim to the object. Bryennios recovered the textual witness for modern readers. Tolstoy used that witness to recover, as he saw it, an obscured challenge to practice.

The crucial fact is his selection. Tolstoy concentrated on the opening five chapters, the instruction on the two ways, and treated them as the heart of the ancient teaching. His preface described the book as having an early moral portion and a later section concerning the arrangement of communal life. He believed the first five chapters offered the substance of Jesus's teaching and that their message was intelligible to anyone willing to walk it. Whether his historical division of the text is sound is a separate question. In the later chapters of this book, we will read the whole *Didache*, including the portions he set aside. Here we must recognize that his powerful edition was also an interpretation of which part mattered most.

His preface does something that a mere historical introduction would not do. It tells readers that scholars had examined the document and that the church's defenders had tried to explain its awkward relation to later practice, while the moral voice of early Christians made too little impression. This is Tolstoy in controversy. He did not regard the manuscript as a curiosity to be admired behind glass. He wanted it to

interrupt the present. By placing the opening way of life before readers, he meant to remove their excuse that Christian teaching was too complicated or obscure to practice.

The postscript unfolds the teaching as a road. Love of God and neighbor supply direction. Anger, greed, lust, pride, and falsehood are wrong turns that begin before their worst public effects. Shared words, peace with others, and freedom from domination are provisions for the journey. In one analogy a father points out the road to a child and gives him a staff and food; the child cannot reasonably claim that no guidance was supplied. The analogy refuses a familiar theology of helpless admiration. We may fail, and the father may guide us back, but we cannot say the road was concealed. For Tolstoy, Christian faith cannot be an endless account of why the walk has not begun.

I hear why that would appeal to the user of a reference Bible, although the directions diverge. Both Tolstoy and Scofield wanted an ordinary reader to have help at hand. Both distrusted a theology locked away among experts. Both offered an account of how Scripture should be read. Scofield supplied headings, chains, and notes by which the Bible could be mapped into ages and peoples. Tolstoy supplied a compact rule that made the reader ask what each day would require. This is not a formal pairing of simultaneous books: Tolstoy's pamphlet preceded Scofield's Bible by almost a quarter-century, arose in another country, and worked at another scale. The comparison concerns the authority a helpful apparatus can acquire in the reader's mind.

Tolstoy's own language about the two portions of the *Didache* risks more certainty than the evidence allows. Ancient works can have layers, but the distinction between chapters one through five as pure original Christianity and all later material as secondary arrangement is too clean. Chapter six continues the instruction and bridges to baptism. The instructions about fasting and prayer include the Lord's Prayer. The thanksgiving prayers give thanks for life and knowledge through Jesus. Chapter eleven tests people who claim to be prophets. Chapter fifteen asks the community to appoint worthy leaders. Chapter sixteen tells it to watch for the end. To classify all this as merely administrative would miss the way a community lives its ethics through practices, judgments, meals, and hope.

The omission has a consequence for Tolstoy's ecclesiology. If early Christians prayed, baptized, broke bread, appointed ministers, and distinguished a true prophet from a false one, then Christianity was not simply a set of universal maxims detachable from a gathered people. Tolstoy could still criticize later institutions; a first-century or second-century practice does not vindicate every later hierarchy. But the whole document places moral teaching inside communal life. The way of life is learned and guarded among others. If a person takes the opening commands to love and then disregards the mechanisms by which an actual church shares food and checks power, the love may become an individual ideal with too little social body.

My sympathy with Tolstoy should therefore be specific. I agree that Jesus's commands cannot be indefinitely postponed, that enemy-love is central, and that a church can sanctify violence while imagining it is defending the faith. I am less persuaded by any claim that doctrinal confession or shared worship is dispensable so long as moral instruction is clear. The early text lets me make both judgments at once. It will not permit Scofield's prophetic scheme to crowd moral obedience out of the foreground; it will not permit Tolstoy to make the rest of Christian communal life a mere historical afterthought.

What did the first five chapters actually ask the Russian reader to do? They asked him to stop hating an enemy and to give to one in need. They asked him not to make a performance of piety while bearing a grudge. They treated an appetite for money as the beginning of theft and anger as the beginning of killing. Tolstoy saw in such teaching a direct address to society's practices. A church that blesses armies cannot

assure itself that anger is harmless because the killing has been formally delegated. A landowner cannot praise almsgiving while refusing to inspect how the land came to be his and what labor sustains his life. These applications are Tolstoy's arguments; the ancient text itself did not write a nineteenth-century Russian political platform. The relation between text and use must remain visible.

The same discipline will matter when we apply the text to Gaza. The *Didache* does not name a modern state, faction, or ceasefire. Its prohibition of murder and instruction to love enemies bear on Christians making judgments about such things, but a specific legal and political conclusion requires study of the actual conduct and the applicable law. When I say the text interrupts a church's reflexive support for a government, I am drawing an implication for discipleship. I should say it as an implication. The moral clarity of the command does not excuse sloppy claims about facts.

Tolstoy's hunger for a popular book also tells us something about audiences. A manuscript in an academic edition can change scholarship and leave ordinary worship untouched. A simple rendering of its opening chapters can travel to people who will never consult the Greek. That circulation is a service, but selection changes emphasis. A reader of his pamphlet might come away believing that the original whole is almost entirely a discourse on moral action, when the whole also includes communal rituals and apocalyptic expectation. A reader of Scofield's Bible may think the underlying Scripture is intrinsically arranged according to dispensations, when the headings are editorial. In each case a mediator helps the reader and simultaneously shapes the field of vision.

This is not a reason to distrust every translation or edition. Access always depends on mediation. Most of us read the Bible in translation; we read ancient Christian writings through introductions and footnotes; even a supposedly bare text has been edited and arranged. The remedy is to know what a mediator has done and keep the original question open. When Tolstoy says the first five chapters are sufficient for the soul's salvation, ask what he left out and why. When Scofield identifies a dispensation beneath a verse, ask where the verse says that and how the rest of Scripture bears on it. We can be grateful for help and still test it.

I imagine a reader in Kansas given Tolstoy's little tract after a Sunday of prophecy teaching. She would encounter words about giving to the needy and blessing a persecutor. She might answer that the familiar pastor teaches those things too. Perhaps he does. The question is which words govern the next conversation when a war is discussed. Does the instruction to bless an enemy become an active test of claims, or does it retreat to private feeling while a political story supplies every public conclusion? The possibility that both messages are preached makes the question harder and more important. A church can sincerely teach charity and still train its members to suspend charity for people assigned a role in a sacred timetable.

The gap between seeing and doing is not only a church problem. Tolstoy knew it in himself. His prose can be severe because he had experienced the temptation to admire truth at a distance. I know a related temptation as a scientist: one can identify an error in a model with satisfying precision and leave one's own habits unaltered. It is easier for me to show that a prophetic diagram has unsupported arrows than to take responsibility for the person made invisible when the diagram is preached. Tolstoy insists that recognition without motion is not yet following a way.

His insistence is also open to abuse. A forceful moral teacher can accuse hesitant people of hypocrisy when they are actually trying to understand complex obligations. Not every delay is evasion. Someone may need to protect a child, weigh conflicting evidence, or learn how a policy works before making a public claim. The *Didache*'s instruction to test prophets is a guard even against the prophet who makes the testing feel disobedient. Tolstoy's certainty about simplicity can itself become a new voice over a text. The reader must

remain responsible before God, neighbor, and evidence, rather than shifting responsibility from Scofield to Tolstoy.

Popov's and Tolstoy's different tasks illustrate the stakes of editing. A scholarly translation can ask what an unfamiliar Greek construction meant to the community that used it and can surround the answer with alternatives. A popular moral tract must decide how much of that uncertainty a reader can carry and still hear the instruction. Tolstoy chose directness. Directness can reveal what an apparatus hides; it can also hide the decisions that produced the direct sentence. His concern that the work become a people's book was noble in purpose. It did not exempt him from the ordinary responsibility of a translator to acknowledge where his reading and the ancient wording diverged.

Consider the second-person commands about giving. The ancient text addresses a learner within a community whose material relations we know only incompletely. Tolstoy turns the command toward his contemporary readers with almost no buffer. He can say, in effect, that if we own goods and claim Christ, the question is now ours. The moral transposition is powerful. It is not identical with a historical description of how each early Christian family held property. A good book must keep both dimensions in view: what these words meant in their early setting and what they might rightly demand in ours. Losing the first invites anachronism; losing the second makes antiquity a museum in which no command can reach the visitor.

His postscript's image of a road also has a distinct literary intelligence. Direction comes before instruction about each turning. If one knows where life lies, the warnings about anger and greed become intelligible as warnings against losing the road rather than as an arbitrary list of prohibitions. The staff and provisions in his analogy acknowledge that a traveler needs help. Tolstoy was sometimes accused of imagining that one could simply will oneself into perfection, but this particular passage speaks of supports: word, fellowship, peace, release from domination. We should not deny their presence because his larger theology seems severe. The more precise criticism is that his selection leaves out much of the ancient handbook's own account of how fellowship is sustained and governed.

The distinction matters when I think of the churches I knew. Their most earnest members were not asking for permission to ignore Jesus. They prayed for strength, attended services, shared food, and helped a person whose car failed. The problem was the range of persons who counted as neighbors when public conflict entered the room. An accessible *Didache* could widen that range. A selectively moralized *Didache* might also fail to show how a congregation checks its speakers and revises its shared political language. If only the private reader is asked to love, the institution can continue issuing confident public judgments without ever testing the teacher who made them.

The *Didache* in fact tests a traveling prophet in a surprisingly social way. Conduct is evidence; a claim to speak by the Spirit does not settle the claim. A modern Christian might say that the rules belong to an ancient setting in which itinerant teachers stayed in homes. True, but the logic has force beyond the ancient lodging arrangement. A teacher may be able to excite a room, explain a complex chart, and ask for trust. The congregation must still ask who benefits from the teaching, whether it makes people more truthful, and how the teacher behaves toward those who cannot help his reputation. Such questions do not make spiritual discernment a mere audit; they make discernment responsible to observable life.

Tolstoy was right to resist a church that treats practical obedience as a minor appendix to correct institutional allegiance. The whole ancient book resists the opposite reduction, in which love survives only as an individual conviction with no gathered body to carry it. A Russian editor choosing an accessible segment from an ancient work could open a door. We need not shut it when we notice what he left behind. We can walk through it and then keep reading. That is the posture I hope to take toward his adaptation:

grateful for its interruption of complacency, free to read all sixteen chapters, unwilling to lend him the authority he objected to in others.

The book we are building thus begins with an asymmetry and a convergence. Tolstoy’s small edition made the moral opening of an ancient handbook speak with extraordinary urgency. Scofield’s large edition would make a modern prophetic synthesis feel immediately available beneath the biblical text. They did not conduct a debate with each other about Gaza, and their texts cannot be staged as direct replies. Yet both left Christians with a question about authority: what stands between Scripture and the life we live in its name? The next chapters follow the American route toward the Bible whose notes I encountered indirectly in church speech. The route begins before Scofield, in arguments among teachers who wanted to make the entire future of Israel and the church legible.

Chapter 4: Before Scofield

A reference Bible can appear to have invented its own method because the teacher's name is printed on the cover. Scofield's method had a prehistory. By the time his notes appeared, other preachers had spent decades teaching American readers how to ask about the end of the age, the future of Israel, and the church's place in a divine sequence. The printed volume gathered and standardized an argument already moving through sermons, conferences, magazines, personal correspondence, and lessons. It is easier to understand its success if we hear those earlier voices instead of treating one man as the whole cause.

Christians had always had to read promises made to Israel alongside a Gospel announced to the nations. The New Testament itself forces the question. The apostles argued about Gentile inclusion, circumcision, the law, and the relation of Israel's story to Jesus. Paul described Gentile believers as Abraham's offspring in Christ and warned those same Gentiles against arrogance toward the Jewish people. Christians have drawn different conclusions about the future of Jewish communities and about prophecies concerning the land. Such differences are older than any modern movement. What took distinctive shape in the nineteenth century was a comprehensive arrangement of those texts into separate divine programs and a more exact sequence of end-time events.

John Nelson Darby is central to that arrangement. A former Anglican priest active among the Brethren, he distinguished the church's union with Christ in heaven from the promises he held still awaited Israel's earthly future. His writings could be intricate and his followers did not repeat him uniformly. Still, the distinction between an earthly people and a heavenly people gave later teachers a way to keep prophetic land promises available to Israel while placing the church in a different position. The church's gathering to Christ could precede the final tribulation; God's dealings with Israel would then move toward their promised completion. This was an organized interpretation of passages, not a verse printed in a single location.

The arrangement answered a genuine concern. Much Christian preaching had spoken as if the church inherited every blessing promised to Israel while Jewish people retained only curses and rejection. Darby's insistence that God had not finished with Israel could check that arrogance. It also risked another error: once two destinies had been specified, the New Testament's insistence on one reconciled body could be accommodated as a temporary interval rather than allowed to reconsider the premise of separation. The motives and the interpretive outcome deserve distinct judgments. One can reject anti-Jewish contempt without accepting Darby's whole architecture. One can affirm that God remains faithful without converting faithfulness into immunity for any modern state.

The word *rapture* shows how an arrangement can grow around a passage. Paul writes to the Thessalonians that believers will be caught up to meet the Lord and comfort one another with the hope of resurrection. The text gives Christians reason to expect Christ, not a detailed chart of how many years separate that meeting from other events. The pretribulation placement requires relating Paul to Daniel, the Gospels, and Revelation through several further inferences. There have been Christians who expected Christ's return and a millennium without adopting those inferences. It is historically careless to treat criticism of a pretribulation scheme as denial of Christ's return. It is equally careless to treat Paul's words as though they mean nothing because one rejects the scheme. The event and the chart must be examined separately.

Three labels help prevent confusion. A premillennial reader expects Christ's return before a coming millennium. A dispensational reader arranges God's dealings into distinguishable administrations and, in the classic form under discussion, keeps Israel's national future distinct from the church's. A pretribulation

reader places the church's gathering before a final period of tribulation. Many believers combine all three, but the first does not entail the other two. When someone says "the rapture is biblical," ask whether he is defending Paul's promise that believers meet the Lord or the precise position of that meeting in a disputed timetable. Precision in these names makes the historical argument fairer and keeps a church from hearing every criticism of a later chart as a denial of an older hope.

In America the British teaching entered a culture already familiar with revival, voluntary religious associations, printing, and experiments in reading prophecy. It did not arrive as a perfect foreign system for passive recipients. Teachers argued over timing, the relation of the kingdom to the church, and the meaning of restored Israel. A conference participant might share another speaker's premillennial hope and reject his precise division of ages. The fact that an idea traveled across the Atlantic tells us little until we see what American teachers selected and how they taught it.

James H. Brookes, a Presbyterian minister in St. Louis, stands near the center of that American story. Through preaching, print, and the Bible conference movement he helped make prophetic study an evangelical practice. Scofield later regarded Brookes as an important teacher. Brookes and his colleagues gathered believers from different denominations to study Scripture, defend its authority, encourage missions, and discuss the future. Their meetings were more than prediction shows. A participant could feel that he was joining a disciplined, interdenominational community serious about the Bible at a moment when many feared its authority was under attack. That aspiration gives the movement its human intelligibility.

The Niagara Bible Conference and its creed illustrate the combination. The creed affirmed central evangelical doctrines and anticipated Christ's return and the restoration of Israel. It belonged to a network that did not have the binding hierarchy of a denomination but could make a shared vocabulary travel. A reader who attended a conference, subscribed to a magazine, heard a popular preacher, and later purchased Scofield's Bible might meet the same distinctions four times in different settings. Repetition would make the categories seem less like one teacher's proposal and more like the obvious framework of biblical study.

I do not mean that the conferences were a single committee voting to manufacture later politics. They were gatherings of people with disagreements and hopes, not a command center. Their language about Israel usually concerned a future divine restoration, and one must not silently replace that expectation with endorsement of every action of the state formed in 1948. The distance between a late nineteenth-century creed and a present lobbying campaign contains wars, empires, migration, the Holocaust, decolonization, American elections, Israeli decisions, Palestinian lives, and church organizations. It takes work to trace that route. The earlier theology matters because it supplied categories later advocates could use. It did not issue their policy statements in advance.

The categories nevertheless have moral force. A preacher tells a congregation that Israel's destiny remains separate from the church's and that land promises require a literal national fulfillment. He then teaches the congregation to watch current events as signs of the plan. When a modern state appears in a place named by Scripture, the older categories can attach themselves to the news. The preacher may add humane qualifications. He may insist that the state remains subject to moral law. Or he may make dissent feel like resistance to God. The theology does not mechanically determine which course he takes. It gives him a set of available moves and gives his listeners reasons to trust some moves more readily than others.

An important confusion enters through the word *Israel*. In Genesis it can name the patriarch Jacob. In the prophets it can name a covenant people, a kingdom, an exiled remnant, or a future hope. In Paul it appears in an argument about his own people and Gentile believers. In a modern news report it names a state whose

citizens include Jewish and non-Jewish people and whose actions are those of particular institutions. These meanings touch, but they do not collapse into one another. If a speaker moves from the first to the last without an argument, a biblical word has performed political work in silence. If a listener has been trained to regard distinction as a lack of faith, she may not know how to ask where the move occurred.

The earlier teachers had arguments for their readings. They did not merely point to a word and hope no one noticed. They assembled passages into chains: Daniel's weeks, the Gospels' warnings, Paul's mysteries, Revelation's visions, and the promises of the prophets. The work was impressive to readers who wanted a whole Bible that could be understood as a single history. It could also become self-confirming. Once Israel and the church had been assigned separate functions, a passage about their union was often read as a fact about a temporary church age rather than as a possible challenge to the division. If an interpretation classifies contrary evidence in advance, its coherence can outpace its truth.

A scientist learns to be suspicious of a model that makes every possible observation confirm it. I do not import laboratory proof into theology; biblical interpretation is not an experiment in which one can rerun Paul. Still, a basic intellectual discipline transfers. We should ask what would count as evidence against our favored way of connecting texts. If Ephesians announces one new humanity, what might make the two-people scheme harder to defend? If Romans warns Gentiles not to boast and speaks of Israel's future, what might make a simple claim that Jewish people have been erased impossible? A good reading has to hear pressure from both directions. A scheme that grants one set of passages absolute control and tucks the others into an exception deserves examination.

For American evangelicals, the system offered more than an answer to a puzzle. It offered orientation in a world of rapid change. A conference teacher could say that the moral and political disorder around believers did not surprise God. Scripture had disclosed an age, its limits, and the hope beyond it. That assurance could sustain missionary courage. It could also train believers to regard public efforts at justice as distractions from a foreordained decline. Different followers drew different lessons. The point is that an account of time can change what a congregation thinks it is responsible to do within time.

The nineteenth-century setting included intense debates about biblical criticism and modern knowledge. Prophetic teachers often believed their coordinated reading upheld Scripture against those who treated the Bible as a merely human collection. Their cross-references gave laypeople the satisfaction of moving through all of Scripture without needing a university. I understand the appeal. A person who feels excluded from academic debate can acquire a disciplined reading practice and find that difficult books begin to connect. The danger begins when the system's connecting principle becomes immune from revision because it is thought to be identical to Scripture's authority. One may trust the Bible deeply and still question the particular route another person has drawn between its verses.

Not all interpreters who hoped for Jewish restoration were dispensationalists. Not all premillennialists were pretribulationists. Not all people who later advocated for Zionism accepted Scofield. Those differences have to remain visible if our historical argument is to mean anything. We can identify a tradition without claiming that every related position shares one origin or one political consequence. Sometimes the most serious disagreement lies inside a family of interpreters. A person can say, "I believe God has a future for Jewish people," and also say, "That belief cannot bless the displacement of another people." The church needs room for that sentence even before it decides whether the first clause is the best reading of the New Testament.

There was also a question about the Messiah at the heart of the method. Does Jesus gather the promises to Israel into himself so that all who belong to him, Jew and Gentile, participate in them? Or do many

promises remain allocated to a distinct national future even while Christ brings salvation to both? The two questions are sometimes framed as if one side must deny that Jewish people are real and the other must deny that Gentiles belong to Christ. That is a poor way to argue. The issue is how the apostles themselves speak of continuity, fulfillment, and difference. Scofield's notes would present a confident answer. Our later chapters will read the passages in which his answer seems, to me, to divide what Christ joined.

I came to these questions late, after years in churches where a preacher could move directly from an Old Testament promise to a twentieth-century headline. I did not hear every intermediate premise stated. That is why the history matters to my own responsibility. A teaching can become part of one's common sense through trusted people who never cite Darby or Brookes. To study them now is not to accuse my pastors of knowingly concealing a genealogy. Many had received their vocabulary just as I received it. The genealogy lets us recognize that a supposedly self-evident reading required a long apprenticeship in certain questions.

One can see the method's attractiveness by sitting with a single prophetic problem. Daniel speaks of weeks, a holy city, an anointed one, and a devastating end. The Gospels report Jesus speaking of desolation and warning his hearers. Revelation gives visions of conflict, witness, and judgment. An interpreter wants to know whether the writers describe one sequence, several related events, or images that cannot be converted into a calendar. A teacher who offers an exact relation between them appears to have done hard work on behalf of the reader. If he also tells the reader that an unfilled interval separates portions of Daniel's sequence, the precision of the diagram can make that interval look as visible as the words on the page. The reader has to ask where the interval came from and what other readings of Daniel and Jesus might require.

The disagreement is not between serious study and lazy moralism. Serious study can conclude that a prophetic fulfillment remains future. It can also conclude that a first-century calamity gives an essential referent or that apocalyptic images resist simple one-to-one identification. The intellectual discipline lies in stating what the text permits, what the system proposes, and where a proposal meets resistance. In my churches, a prophecy chart could produce the feeling that every question had been settled, but a settled feeling is not the same as the evidence having been weighed. An outline printed at a conference may be an invitation to study or an instrument for ending study; the difference lies in how teachers let hearers question it.

Brookes's importance cannot be measured only by how many of Darby's conclusions he repeated. A teacher in an American Presbyterian and interdenominational setting could adapt the emphasis for his own audience. He could present the Bible as a unified revelation whose future promises were dependable, link this assurance to evangelism, and urge vigilance. The movement's centers were congregations and voluntary meetings rather than a single Brethren assembly. That adaptation made the framework available to people with no desire to change denominations. Scofield's later annotations would achieve the same kind of mobility in print: a Baptist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, or independent reader could carry the book without accepting an entire new church polity.

The antithesis sometimes proposed between prophecy and mission also needs restraint. A believer convinced that Christ may return soon might urgently preach, give money to a missionary society, and care for a neighbor. The same conviction might lead another believer to dismiss attempts at public reform as futile. Both possibilities exist, and neither can be assigned automatically to every conference speaker. We should examine actual preaching and institutional action. What is distinctive in the later political story is not that all premillennialists abandoned charity. It is that a particular set of interpretive categories could authorize remarkable certainty about land and government while leaving the moral terms of that certainty insufficiently examined.

A final complication comes from the Jewish people themselves. Christian teachers debating the future of Israel were usually talking about Jews in a Christian theological framework, sometimes with missionary aims, often without Jewish participants shaping the question. The fact that a Christian reading assigns a "role" to Jews does not mean Jews have accepted that role. Likewise, Palestinian Arabs, including Christians, lived in the land toward which European and American imaginations turned. A prophecy conference did not necessarily discuss them as subjects with their own history. Silence in a nineteenth-century lecture is not proof of deliberate malice toward a later people. It is a limit of perspective that later believers must not preserve as an obligation.

Before Scofield, then, there were meetings, arguments, publications, and a hunger for a guide. The guide needed to be portable, familiar, and sufficiently comprehensive that a reader could turn from one question to the next without leaving it. Scofield's reference Bible answered that practical need. It put the conference teacher's cross-references into a volume a person would carry to church. What changed when that happened was not merely the speed with which an idea could spread. The idea's location changed. It appeared beside the words believers regarded as God's Word. The second voice on the page would be heard precisely where authority was already strongest.

Chapter 5: The Second Voice on the Page

The first Scofield Reference Bible appeared through Oxford University Press's American branch in 1909. A revised New and Improved Edition followed in 1917. That pair of dates matters because it is easy to speak about "the Scofield Bible" as one fixed object. Notes evolved, printings varied, and a later edition should not be placed retroactively in the hands of the first buyers. The common innovation was an organized set of book introductions, headings, topical references, summaries, and annotations meant to be usable alongside the King James text. Scofield wanted the reader to find help at the place of need. In a sense, the volume was a portable teacher.

Help at the place of need is a generous ideal. A reader alone with an ancient passage may benefit from a note about a place, a difficult word, or a relation to another part of Scripture. I have relied on study Bibles. The trouble is not that Scofield printed words beneath the biblical text. It is that the words beneath it carried a comprehensive interpretive scheme whose conclusions could appear to be the verse's own obvious meaning. The type distinguishes the voices. A community's practice can reunite them so tightly that a child learns the note and the verse as one lesson.

Open the 1917 edition at Genesis 12. God calls Abram, promises to make of him a great nation, promises blessing, and says that all families of the earth will be blessed in him. Scofield places the call within a scheme of dispensations, describing it as the beginning of the fourth, the dispensation of promise. This is a way of ordering the story. The narrative does not announce a numbered period. The note also calls the Abrahamic covenant unconditional while distinguishing the enjoyment of its blessings in the land from the permanence of the promise. Such reasoning may be defended. It is not equivalent to simply repeating the passage. The reader has moved from an ancient narration to a theological classification.

That movement has practical effects. A period label tells the reader how to place Abraham in a complete timeline before the reader has followed the plot of Genesis far enough to see what questions the text itself raises. It creates a filing system. Abraham's journey becomes one compartment; law, church, and kingdom are other compartments. An organized mind likes compartments, and they can aid memory. But what happens when later Scripture takes a promise from one compartment and announces that Gentiles share it in Christ? Does the filing system yield to the apostolic argument, or does it assign the apostles' words to a parallel spiritual blessing while keeping a separate earthly allotment intact? That decision is the theological heart of the matter.

Scofield's longer 1917 note at Genesis 15:18 offers more nuance than a simple accusation would allow. He distinguishes Hebrew descendants by birth from a spiritual posterity of faith, including Jews and Gentiles. He even notices the line through Ishmael. He identifies blessing for all families through Christ. I emphasize this because it would be easy to make him deny every connection between Abraham and Gentile believers, and then defeat that claim with a verse he himself already acknowledged. His position is subtler: spiritual participation in Abraham does not, for him, exhaust the promises to a national Israel. He expects the fullness of Israel's restoration in a future associated with the Lord's return. That view must be met at its strongest point.

The note also brings the ancient blessing and curse language into the historical treatment of Jews. Christian persecution of Jewish people is indeed a terrible fact, and a church should examine it without waiting for a special theory of curses. Yet the step from God's promise to Abram to a rule about contemporary governments is not given by Genesis. Scofield died before the state of Israel existed. A present-day preacher who uses the promise to claim that military policy must be exempt from criticism has added an

argument of his own. The notes can make the addition seem natural; the addition should still be named. Jewish life and the actions of a state are distinct subjects of moral concern.

I have heard Genesis 12:3 used as if its last political implication were self-evident: “Bless Israel,” followed by a policy conclusion. But even the sentence “bless Israel” requires work. Does it mean refuse hatred toward Jewish people? Pray for all in the land? Affirm an ancient covenant? Support a current government’s particular operation? Reject antisemitism? Provide arms? A speaker who has not specified which meaning he intends can let the sacred resonance of the phrase cover a decision he has not defended. I can affirm the duty to reject anti-Jewish hatred without signing an unspecified political authorization. The distinction honors rather than evades Scripture.

The 1917 note at Romans 11 reveals another part of the system. Paul denies that God has cast off his people and warns Gentile believers, pictured as wild branches grafted into an olive tree, against boasting over natural branches. Scofield reads the chapter as preserving distinctive national promises for Israel while Christians share Abraham’s spiritual blessings. His concern about Gentile arrogance has textual force. I share it. Yet Paul’s one tree is a difficult picture for a rigid two-destiny scheme. The root supports both branches; the Gentile is grafted in, not issued a different tree in a neighboring field. The later theological question will be whether Scofield’s categories help us hear that image or make us assign it a role decided in advance.

At Ephesians 3:6, Scofield’s note acknowledges that Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers of the promise in Christ. It then distinguishes promises to the church from Israel’s still unfulfilled earthly promises. This is a close-reading site of unusual importance. If he had simply denied Gentile inclusion, the answer would be short. He instead accepts the apostle’s words and places them inside a larger architecture that limits what their shared inheritance changes about other promises. We have to ask whether the architecture explains the text or protects itself against the implications of the text. A reader should decide after hearing both the apostle’s sentence and the note’s distinction.

Scofield’s treatment of 1 Thessalonians 4 also demands accuracy. Paul says believers will be caught up to meet the Lord. Scofield identifies the passage with the church’s gathering, and elsewhere the system relates this event to other prophetic passages and the sequence before tribulation. It would be false to say that the idea of believers meeting Christ was invented in a margin. It would also be false to say that Paul explicitly supplies every step in the later timetable. The note is a bridge from one passage into a coordinated series of claims. The rapture’s existence as a biblical phrase and the placement of a pretribulation rapture in a chart are not one undivided proposition.

This way of reading requires an eye for what the editorial apparatus does between verses. A topical chain looks like a collection of evidence, and often it is. Yet selection and order are interpretive acts. If the chain connects a prophecy in Daniel to a scene in Revelation, it asks the reader to treat them as parts of a single chronology. That may be right; it needs argument. If a heading labels a paragraph “the church” and another “Israel,” it directs attention before the paragraph begins. A study Bible is not merely supplying answers to questions already asked. It can teach the questions and set the borders within which an answer counts as faithful.

I think of a student in an undergraduate laboratory. The measurement appears on a screen, and a program fits a curve. The fitted curve is useful, sometimes indispensable. It is also a model built through assumptions about the instrument and the relation among points. A poorly trained student begins to report the curve as though the instrument directly measured its extrapolated future. In a church, the analogy has

limits, but the distinction remains. Scripture is the text. Scofield's timeline and distribution of promises are a model of the text. To love Scripture is not to conceal the difference between the two.

The title page and the publisher intensified the effect. Oxford University Press brought manufacturing and distribution capacities and a name many readers associated with learned care. Scofield listed consulting editors from evangelical institutions and thanked collaborators, while reserving final editorial responsibility for the notes to himself. The result was neither the solitary production of a man without a network nor an official decree of Oxford University. Oxford published the volume; it did not make every prophetic footnote the doctrine of a university. Buyers nevertheless reasonably perceived a respectable artifact. Trust in paper, layout, and imprint can bleed into trust in the adjacent interpretation.

Its circulation was substantial. An Oxford retrospective published in 1959 reported that sales accelerated after the revision and had reached one million by 1930. A sales figure is not a survey of assent. People bought and inherited the book for different reasons; some disagreed with the notes. It does tell us that many homes and churches could encounter the scheme without attending a conference or reading Darby's essays. Even a member who never owned the volume might hear its categories from a teacher who did. Influence travels through intermediaries, and later repetitions often erase their source.

A pastor using the book may also teach it selectively. One congregation may adopt its prophecy chart and ignore a note about another doctrine. Another may use the references as a convenient index and argue with the commentary. That variability is important. The book is not a device that compels identical thinking when opened. Its importance is the ease with which a set of distinctions could be reproduced and the prestige under which they could be introduced. It gave an existing movement a standard object. The object could then become a quiet authority even where no one remembered the conferences that formed it.

The word *plain* began to trouble me as I examined this history. In the churches I knew, a speaker could say he was simply reading the Bible. But to distinguish the church's heavenly destiny from Israel's earthly one, relate Daniel's weeks to Revelation, place a gathering before a tribulation, and transfer an ancient blessing into a contemporary political obligation is not a merely plain act. It is learned interpretation. Some learned interpretations are sound. Their learned character is no disgrace. The error is to deny it, since denying it makes correction appear to be rebellion against God rather than a disagreement with a teacher.

Scofield's notes cannot be the only cause of Christian Zionism. Christian interest in Jewish restoration preceded his birth, Zionist political movements had their own agency and motives, and later American organizations made choices he did not make. Nor can the book's existence explain the choices of a particular church without evidence of what that church taught. It gives us a documented channel through which categories traveled. The later chapters will examine how such categories became political and how church members in my own region heard them through more than one channel. Here the physical page shows what it made easy: a modern interpreter's voice became available at the instant a believer sought a sacred answer.

I still use annotated editions. I could not write this chapter without them. The answer to an overtrusted note is a more responsible reading, not a fantasy of reading with no inherited help. Read the passage at length. Identify what the author in Scripture actually says. Notice what the note adds, how it connects texts, and what the connection excludes. Consult an interpreter who disagrees. Let a difficult passage press against your favored scheme instead of classifying it away. Above all, ask what the scheme teaches you to ignore when a living person enters the discussion. That last question does not settle an exegetical dispute, but it prevents a Bible lesson from becoming an alibi for absent moral attention.

One elementary reading exercise is available to any church member: read Ephesians 2 and 3 straight through without a topical heading or a detached verse. The movement is from estrangement to peace: Gentiles had been alienated from Israel’s commonwealth, but Christ has broken down the dividing wall and created one new humanity. In chapter three Paul calls the inclusion of Gentiles a revealed mystery and names them fellow heirs in the same body. This does not by itself answer every question about the land, because Paul is addressing reconciliation in Christ rather than drafting a territorial constitution. It does prevent us from treating Gentile inclusion as an incidental side arrangement. The force of “fellow” and “same” asks to be heard before a category explains its limits.

Then read Romans 9 through 11 without using it merely as a list of proof verses. Paul grieves for his kin, names the privileges of Israel, insists that God’s word has not failed, speaks of a remnant, pictures Gentiles grafted into an olive tree, and warns them against conceit. He anticipates mercy in a manner that has provoked long debate. A Christian who interprets the church as sharing Israel’s promises cannot simply leap over Paul’s grief and warning. A Christian who insists on a future national fulfillment cannot use that insistence to authorize Gentile arrogance of another sort, as though he alone has understood the plan and the actual people in the land must submit to his chart. The whole argument is a check on the pride of the reader.

The two readings press against each other productively. Ephesians says unity in Christ is not optional. Romans says Jewish people are not a discarded remainder. A sound theology should be able to speak both sentences without dissolving either. Scofield’s distinction between spiritual and national promises is one attempt. I think it gives a national destiny excessive control over passages that announce a common inheritance, but the objection must be argued, not merely asserted. If I were to make Ephesians erase Jewish distinctiveness, I would be repeating the same methodological failure in reverse. The apparatus of a good study Bible should help the reader hold the tension rather than quietly resolve it before the first verse is read.

The difference between the 1909 and 1917 editions matters for such exercises. A sentence cited from the revised edition is evidence that readers after its publication could see it. It is not proof that the identical wording shaped every sermon in 1909. Many discussions of historical influence proceed as though a book’s later, better-known form existed at its first appearance. If one wants to claim that a particular note affected a politician or pastor at a particular date, one must establish which edition was available and whether there is evidence that the person read or echoed it. Otherwise one has established plausibility, not transmission. The distinction may feel fussy until the book is asked to bear the weight of explaining public decisions.

The blank space around a note can also be evidence. A commentary line may explain a covenant while leaving out the ethical consequence a reader would expect from the Sermon on the Mount. A reference chain may move across prophets and epistles while never stopping to ask who lives in the place being discussed. The absence does not make the editor endorse their harm; no reference Bible could discuss everything. Yet what the apparatus consistently foregrounds and backgrounds trains attention. A student who repeatedly receives a timeline in response to a question about people may learn to regard the people as an application to be added later. That is the kind of influence we can investigate without pretending to measure every reader’s interior life.

The manuscript of the *Didache* presents a different editorial risk. Tolstoy’s selection foregrounded the opening moral road and backgrounded the practices that made a community. Scofield’s apparatus foregrounded the classification of ages and peoples within Scripture. Each act of arrangement involved a hope for readers and a loss of perspective. I oppose Scofield’s conclusion and am drawn to Tolstoy’s, but I

want an editorial rule that can criticize the man I favor too. Let the text interrupt its helper. Read the whole ancient handbook after reading Tolstoy’s five chapters. Read the whole apostolic argument after reading the footnote beneath one verse. A faithful guide should make that interruption easier, not less likely.

The note speaks confidently in a small space. The space can contain a genuine insight, an error, or both. Scofield’s answer to the problem of Israel and the church deserves close argument, which this book will supply. Its authority cannot rest on the accident that it was printed beneath a verse. The question of how it got there takes us from a page to a man, a network of donors, and a publishing contract. The historical route is less mysterious than many later stories suggest. It is also more instructive, because it shows how ordinary, visible transactions can make an interpretation feel as though it had always belonged to the text.

Chapter 6: The Man, the Money, and Oxford

A poor argument against Scofield can be assembled from his life. One selects every damaging report, assumes the worst version of each disputed event, and concludes that his Bible notes must therefore be false. An equally poor defense takes his eventual ministry as proof that every accusation was erased and that every note must be true. The life matters because churches trusted its teller and because the book needed years of labor and money. It does not replace the work of reading the notes. A biographical investigation can expose the machinery of authority without pretending that a divorce decree determines the meaning of Ephesians.

Cyrus Ingerson Scofield's early path was not the smooth preparation for a pastorate that later book jackets can suggest. He served as a young man in the Confederate army, practiced law, sat in the Kansas legislature, and briefly served as United States district attorney for Kansas. He resigned that federal position in December 1873 amid scandal. His first marriage to Leontine broke down, and the divorce became final in 1883. His association with evangelical conversion is generally placed around 1879. He took the pastorate of a small Congregational church in Dallas in 1883 and built a much wider teaching ministry over the following decades. Each fact tells us something about the passage from public disorder to public religious authority. None tells us directly whether his later distinction between Israel and the church is sound.

The land transactions, charges of forgery, drinking, and reports of imprisonment require a more discriminating account than polemics usually give them. Contemporary records and later biographers do not establish each popular allegation at the same level. A Texas historical account acknowledges a forgery scandal and disagreement about imprisonment. His friend Arno C. Gaebelein conceded an earlier struggle with drink while rejecting the lurid story that most Bible notes were written in jail. One should inspect court records and dates before telling a particular land-deed story as settled. In this book, the documented resignation, family rupture, and pastorate carry enough weight. We do not need to harden every rumor to show that a teacher had a difficult past.

The first family must not disappear behind the rhetoric of a second beginning. Leontine and the children were people, not merely obstacles to a redemptive arc. I do not have their conversations, and I will not invent what they felt in a private room. The public fact of separation and divorce requires a Christian biographer to resist the habit of treating the man's religious career as the only life that counts. When churches forgive a public figure, they can rightly believe that a person is more than an earlier wrong. They can also wrongly presume that the injured people must disappear from the account so that the testimony sounds complete.

I recognize this tendency in revival culture. A changed life can be recounted as a sequence: disorder, conversion, service, fruit. A listener may need to hear that change is possible. She may also need to know whether repentance included repair toward people who had borne the cost. The available record does not permit me to resolve every private question about Scofield's family. The limit is itself instructive. Public Christian authority should not be granted on the basis of a dramatic conversion story alone, nor should it be denied merely because the story began badly. A congregation should look for sound teaching, responsible conduct, and the ability to bear scrutiny.

Kansas has a particular claim on my attention because it is my region. I have heard descriptions of a gullible Kansas or Texas church accepting a doctrine from a man with a scandalous history, as though geography and small size measured theological intelligence. That shortcut deserves rejection. Scofield's

first Dallas congregation may have numbered only a few people, but we cannot deduce their level of biblical understanding from a head count. Nor can we infer that they accepted the full later system of his reference Bible when they accepted him as pastor. He developed his public teaching over time. We may ask what that church knew and how it assessed him; we should not fill an archival silence with a judgment about the minds of ordinary members.

His Confederate service also cannot be treated as a neutral line in a résumé. The Confederacy's existence was bound to the defense of slavery. A religious biography that uses wartime service as a colorful youthful episode while becoming obsessed with a rumored Jewish patron has inverted its moral priorities. Yet the fact of service does not by itself adjudicate a century-later footnote. We can examine what an American evangelical movement remembered or minimized about a man's past while still conducting the theological argument in Scripture. Historical accountability gains strength when it refuses irrelevant shortcuts.

The more direct path to the reference Bible runs through teachers and meetings. Scofield studied in the prophetic circle of James H. Brookes. He preached, organized Bible instruction, developed a correspondence course, and worked at East Northfield in the world of Moody's Bible conferences. He returned to Dallas in 1903 and increasingly devoted himself to the editorial project. The finished book thus emerged from an existing ministry rather than from a stranger who suddenly appeared at a publisher's door. Its audience had partly been made before the contract was signed. A pastor who had heard him could lend the new volume personal credibility; a student of the course could recognize its categories in the notes.

The practical question was time. A teacher who supports himself by ministry cannot easily stop for years to prepare a full Bible apparatus. Gaebelein's account, written retrospectively by an admirer and participant, places a decisive discussion at a Bible conference on Long Island. Scofield described the desired reference Bible and the financial difficulty of preparing it. Gaebelein named Alwyn Ball Jr., John T. Pirie, and John B. Buss among men who provided or pledged help; Francis E. Fitch, associated with publication of Scofield's correspondence course, also joined the undertaking. This is an account from a friend, not an audited ledger for every expenditure. It gives concrete names and a plausible structure for the work: money bought editorial time.

Money can shape a book without writing its sentences. The donors wanted to make a certain sort of Bible available, and their support made work possible. That does not establish that they drafted a line at Genesis 12. It is also not evidence that the work was financially neutral, as though a doctrinally distinctive publication could appear without human preferences and resources. The ordinary material history is already consequential. A person who hopes to influence a century of church teaching needs to pay for paper and labor at some point. It matters who can do that and which projects attract support.

Gaebelein's account of the publishing route is similarly specific. An English publisher associated with Morgan and Scott recommended Oxford because a smaller gospel publishing house might lack the distribution to reach readers broadly. The recommendation led to Henry Frowde and consultation with Oxford's American branch. Gaebelein reproduced a June 1907 letter in which Scofield described making the arrangement directly with Oxford, which would commit its own capital and organization to the edition. This is a route one can test against correspondence and publishing records. It does not disclose every private conversation in the press. It does show that the edition did not require a mysterious external purchaser of Oxford's compliance.

A later letter about imported Bible paper, typesetting, and an intended January publication date lets the reader see an apparently ethereal theological system become a manufactured object. An editor had to decide where a note would fit; a printer had to set type so the biblical text and the annotation could live on

one page; a firm had to manage cost and distribution. The physical problem shaped the intellectual solution. Brief, confident notes were suited to the crowded page. A long history of interpretive disputes would not have fit beneath each verse. The format favored the impression that each difficult passage had a compact answer ready for use.

Oxford's name increased the reach and apparent credibility of the result. A university press can publish a work because it sees a market and an editorially viable project; the act of publication is not a declaration that every theological claim is the university's doctrine. Conversely, the imprint is not meaningless. It helped place Scofield's framework before readers in durable editions distributed at scale. The distinction between institutional publishing and institutional doctrinal endorsement should be maintained precisely because prestige can quietly blur it in a purchaser's mind.

The press's complete internal motives cannot be recovered from a friend's account alone. Perhaps particular editors judged the notes especially valuable. Perhaps they thought primarily of a market among Bible readers already seeking such helps. These possibilities can coexist, and we would need the relevant correspondence and business records to weigh them further. The available evidence supports a narrower statement: a network supported Scofield's preparation, an introduction to Oxford occurred through named publishing contacts, and Oxford issued and distributed the volume. The story is public enough to explain much of the book's success.

That is where the New York lawyer enters the popular retelling. Samuel Untermyer, sometimes spelled Untermeyer in later discussion, was a prominent attorney. A secondary report of a Lotos Club admission record places Scofield in that New York social and literary club, where Untermyer also belonged. The reported overlap is interesting because it places men from different worlds in one social institution. It does not establish that they met, became friends, exchanged money, discussed prophecy, or negotiated a Bible contract. The reported record names other men as Scofield's proposer and seconder. Gaebelein's named financial supporters and publishing route name other people. Even if the club record is confirmed, a roster does not bridge those gaps.

I am willing to follow new evidence wherever it leads. If an authentic account book shows a payment from Untermyer, the claim of a payment should be reported. If a letter shows him recommending the project to Oxford, that too should be reported. Even then, further questions would remain: why did he give money, what did he know of the notes, and did he influence any of their content? The evidence now available does not establish the familiar claim that a Jewish lawyer secretly sponsored Scofield's theology in order to produce Christian support for a future state. The national movement and the eventual founding of that state have histories and agents of their own; the Scofield Bible preceded the founding by decades.

The religious identity of the lawyer is often treated as the crucial clue, and that treatment should make us more careful, not more credulous. A tale about hidden Jewish wealth directing Christian theology toward Jewish geopolitical ends belongs to a recognizable family of antisemitic explanations. It gives Gentile Christians an excuse to say their own teachers, publishers, churches, and voters were manipulated instead of admitting that they freely adopted and promoted a teaching. I oppose Scofield's framework. I do not need to attribute it to a Jewish conspirator in order to reject it. If the framework helped dull Christian attention to Palestinians, the churches that taught it have more reason to account for their choices when the false escape route is closed.

One can still investigate the Lotos Club seriously. Social networks matter. Membership could afford access to publishing conversations, potential donors, and cultural legitimacy. The historical method is to move from a roster to letters, meeting records, dated contacts, and transactions, not from a roster to a dramatic

purpose assigned to a stranger. Perhaps no record of a particular conversation survived. That possibility does not transform speculation into evidence. It leaves the claim unresolved. In a book about the moral consequences of careless reading, I cannot let my own historical reading become careless at its most tempting point.

Scofield's past gives critics a different temptation. If he was unreliable in one episode, perhaps the doctrine can be dismissed without being read. I understand the reaction to stories of an abandoned family or dubious dealings. A church ought to ask what it knew when it offered him a pulpit. Yet the falsity of an argument is established by the argument's failure, not by its author's sins. Tolstoy had grievous contradictions too. If I defended his moral teaching only by making him a perfect husband, landowner, and father, the defense would collapse. The two men's lives deserve examination, but neither a saint's legend nor an indictment substitutes for listening to the texts.

The title "doctor," used in the religious world around Scofield, is another small lesson in attributed authority. Honorifics can reflect communal esteem without telling us exactly what formal training a person completed. The absence of a particular credential would not prove that a reader's biblical interpretation was false; the presence of a title would not prove it true. What matters is the way that title, a publisher's name, a set of consulting editors, and a disciplined layout could create a climate of trust. Readers are responsible for testing even work produced by people and institutions they respect.

The small Dallas congregation presents a more demanding question than a joke about sophistication. What would a responsible church have been able to know about a candidate arriving with a broken public past and a developing biblical system? It could ask for accounts from the people who knew him, listen to his teaching, observe whether he bore correction, and consider the people affected by his earlier decisions. It could also believe a conversion genuine without assuming that conversion confers expertise. I cannot tell from the surviving record exactly which of these tasks it performed. The gap should not be filled by inventing a gullible church. It should make present churches ask whether they distinguish evidence of repentance, pastoral gifts, and the accuracy of an elaborate doctrine. They are related questions, not the same question.

Imagine a composite committee in a church I might have known. One member is grateful for a preacher whose own past gives hope to people struggling with alcohol. Another worries that the account of his family has been told only from his side. A third says the preacher opened the Bible in a way she had never heard before. None of them is foolish, and none has enough information simply by reporting an impression. They would need patience and independent inquiry. What often happens instead is that the apparent fruit of a ministry becomes an answer to every unresolved question. Attendance rises, so the doctrine must be sound; people weep, so the character must be sound. Those inferences are attractive in a revival setting, and they can conceal rather than settle the work of discernment.

A donor faces related questions. Helping a teacher finish a book can be an act of generosity, but the donor also acquires a responsibility to understand the project he makes possible. Did Ball, Pirie, Buss, or Fitch examine the doctrinal consequences they expected the apparatus to have? Gaebelein's friendly account tells us something about their support, not the full extent of each man's deliberation. We should not assign motives for which the record gives no warrant. The broader lesson is concrete: Christians with money can decide which interpretations become widely available. The decision may be sincere and openly made; it is still a decision with consequences that cannot be dissolved into the phrase "the Bible spread."

A publisher has another kind of power. Oxford did not create the words of Genesis or Paul, but it determined that this editorial frame could accompany them at scale. A reader buying a Bible often expects

the biblical text to be stable and may give the surrounding apparatus more trust than she gives an independent theological tract. The press could judge type, binding, accuracy of reproduction, market, and the reputation of collaborators. Whether it judged the contested theology in a way that would satisfy every church is another matter. This is not an accusation that a commercial publisher caused all later readings. It is recognition that the distribution of interpretive tools changes the ordinary environment in which readers form judgments.

Tolstoy's path from manuscript to public did not use Oxford's machinery. A Russian scholar's translation, Tolstoy's adaptation, a periodical, a hoped-for popular readership, and censorship concerns shaped what appeared. The routes differ in scale, genre, and intention. The shared fact is that a reader never simply received an ancient voice without mediators. Bryennios edited; Popov translated and discussed; Tolstoy selected; Scofield annotated; publishers decided what to put before whom. The historical question is not whether mediation can be abolished. It is whether its choices are made visible enough for readers to test them. In that respect Tolstoy's declaration that he favored the opening five chapters is easier to identify than a familiar note whose categories later circulate as though they were part of the verse.

There is a pastoral temptation here for me as well. Having found a text that speaks so strongly to my objection, I could make Tolstoy's edition the new object that ends all argument. A person might say, "The *Didache* says love enemies," and use the truth of that command to avoid a difficult factual dispute about a war. The command is a demand on my conduct and speech, not a substitute for knowing what happened. If I ask the Scofield reader to name the bridge between biblical promise and current policy, I must name the bridge between ancient instruction and my own current judgment. Otherwise I have exchanged one overtrusted apparatus for another.

The answer is a church willing to work. It can examine a candidate's biography with fairness toward family members who might otherwise be forgotten. It can examine a donor's interests without imagining a hidden ethnicity-based plot. It can examine an editor's notes in the light of the whole passage. It can examine a government's conduct under moral and legal standards without assuming the result in advance from prophecy. These examinations take time and often disappoint a congregation's desire for instant certainty. Revival, if it deserves the word, might include the patience to complete them.

There is a longer social history behind the appearance of a self-contained book. Many readers had already been told to distrust certain established church authorities and trust direct access to Scripture. A reference Bible satisfied that desire while supplying an alternative authority in the very form of direct access. The reader no longer had to ask an ordained scholar what Daniel meant; the answer stood beside Daniel in a compact note. The democratizing promise was real. So was the transfer of authority to the interpreter who controlled the notes. The most effective new authority can be one that presents itself as the removal of old intermediaries.

The physical book then did what no conference teacher alone could do. It crossed denominational boundaries, entered houses, became a gift, survived a preacher's death, and waited for the next question. In 1917 it could be revised and given another generation of readers. A later school could teach its categories; a pastor could preach them; a radio speaker could simplify them; a church member could repeat them without ever seeing the name Gaebelein or the contract with Oxford. By then the scholarly and financial history would be almost invisible. The system would seem to arise when the Bible was opened.

I cannot say, from this history alone, exactly how many believers accepted each note or exactly how a specific American official came to a policy. Sales and networks establish reach and opportunity, not uniform assent or a mechanical chain of causation. The political sections of this book will examine the later

links separately. The account of preparation and publication does establish something morally important now: the framework was the work of human beings with histories, commitments, money, and institutions. To question it is not to question God’s right to speak. It is to question a particular human answer to how God has spoken.

The chapter began with damaged biography and ends with ordinary publication because I want the reader to resist two seductive explanations. Scofield was not an immaculate vessel whose annotations must be accepted for his ministry’s sake. He was also not merely a rogue manipulated by a hidden Jewish patron. He was a consequential Christian editor, formed by a public network of prophetic teaching and enabled by named supporters and a capable publisher. The strongest challenge to his book will be made by reading the biblical texts carefully and then asking what his system taught churches to see and fail to see. The manuscript from Bryennios’s library gives us a question to carry into that reading: when a teaching acquires authority, does it lead us along the way of life, or does its confidence let us walk past the neighbor we have been told to love?

Part II: The Two Ways in Full

Chapter 7: The Way of Life and the Way of Death

I was trained as a scientist to distrust an experiment whose outcome had been decided in the apparatus. A measuring device can record what it was designed to record and leave something decisive outside its range. The Christian version of that mistake occurs when a congregation has learned to recognize signs of an approaching end but has not learned to recognize the beginning of a quarrel, the concealment of a debt, or the moment a stranger becomes invisible. We can collect observations and still have chosen the wrong instrument.

The Didache begins without an elaborate account of the end. It begins with a road. There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and the difference between them is great. This is an old form of moral instruction, with Jewish antecedents; it is not a claim that the church invented ethics where none existed. The first sentences join love of God to love of neighbor and to the rule against doing to another what one would not wish done to oneself. Then the teaching moves rapidly to the uninvited person: bless a curser, pray for a persecutor, give to someone who asks. A road is known by walking it. One cannot settle its direction by announcing a destination and declining the next step.

Tolstoy saw that practical grammar almost at once. When he introduced his version of the Didache in 1885, he treated its opening chapters as the ancient expression of the teaching Jesus delivered on the mountain. He was not the discoverer of the manuscript; Philotheos Bryennios had published it two years earlier. Tolstoy became one of its moral interpreters. His account of the traveler whom a father equips with directions and provisions is moving because it makes knowledge answerable to motion. A child cannot plead that the father did not furnish an entire geography when the instruction at the immediate turning was plain. To Tolstoy, the churches had made the route obscure by multiplying doctrines that allowed them to admire Jesus without taking the road he named.

I share his impatience with that evasion. I also want to read the document Tolstoy received, rather than the document made to fit his preference. The Didache contains sixteen chapters. The first six introduce the Two Ways and the disciplines of the life they require. Chapters seven through fifteen describe baptism, fasting, prayer, thanksgiving, traveling teachers, hospitality, local leaders, and reconciliation. The last chapter waits for the Lord. Some of these materials may have different histories; scholars dispute their dates, sources, and arrangement. The surviving composition gives them to us together. The moral road leads into a worshiping community, and the worshiping community remains on the road while it waits. Removing either half makes the ancient witness easier to enlist and less able to challenge us.

The first chapter is at once generous and difficult. Giving to everyone who asks seems unqualified for a moment, until the text distinguishes the person in need from the one who receives without need and counsels deliberation about an alms. The point is not that I may withhold help whenever I can invent a reason to doubt someone. It is that generosity has to survive the knowledge that goods are finite and some people exploit trust. The injunction to give does not disappear when prudence enters. The burden shifts to the giver to ask honestly what need is and what the gift might accomplish. The caution about undeserving recipients can be used to cancel the obligation in the preceding line. That turns prudence into a way of keeping the money. The Didache will later require hospitality to travelers and impose limits on a visitor's stay. It repeatedly holds openhandedness and discernment together.

Its second chapter names acts the community is not to commit: murder, sexual wrongdoing, theft, deceit, sorcery, harm to children, greed, slander, and hatred. We can disagree with how an ancient author grouped particular acts without pretending the catalog has no governing shape. People can be wounded by bodies, words, money, and status. A worshiper is responsible for all four. The refusal of murder is not an abstract sign of good intentions while one lends a voice to the public justification of killing. The refusal of false witness is not limited to the courtroom while one repeats a story about a whole population that makes its suffering seem deserved. The list makes an ethical life much harder to partition than church programming would suggest.

Chapter three takes a step backward from the visible wrong to its beginning in habit. Anger tends toward murder. Jealousy and quarrels are dangerous even before anyone bleeds. Lustful looking prepares another sort of injury; a taste for lies makes theft easier. This is not a theory that every angry person will kill or every impatient person become a thief. It is a pedagogy of beginnings. A person often knows exactly when a sentence was first rehearsed in the mind, when contempt became pleasurable, when a convenient falsehood made the next one effortless. Tolstoy's reading of these passages linked the prohibition of violence to the formation of a violent imagination. He objected to a society that condemned the final act while educating children to admire the pride and patriotic anger that could lead to it.

Here I have to move carefully. The anger of someone enduring oppression is not morally identical to the anger of a person who can inflict it. A demand that the injured speak softly before anyone will listen may turn the Didache into another instrument of power. Jesus' warning about anger and contempt addresses the disposition that reduces another person to an obstacle or an object of scorn; it does not require the victim to describe the injury as tolerable. The Didache tells the hearer to correct some people, pray for others, and love some more than life itself. It does not make a calm facial expression the measure of truth. A congregation that disciplines the tone of the wounded and excuses the deeds of its protectors is walking in the wrong direction while reciting the right words.

Chapter four turns from the solitary conscience to a network of obligations. Remember the person who speaks God's word; seek the company of faithful people; make peace between those at odds; judge without favoritism; give from what you possess; do not send away the person in want. Parents are to teach children. Masters are warned not to command servants in bitterness, though the text also tells servants to obey masters. A reader in my time cannot treat those lines as a satisfactory account of freedom. They show an early Christian community functioning within ancient slavery, restraining some conduct without abolishing the relation. Tolstoy could draw a radical lesson about domination from the equality before God implied in the same passage, but he could not honestly claim that every social arrangement in this manual was already his political program. The ancient text preserves both moral resources and moral limits. Reading it as a living challenge does not require congratulating it for having solved every question we have inherited.

The instruction about property has an edge the church often dulls. Do not say that what is yours belongs only to you. If believers share in what is immortal, why close their hands over what passes away? This does not give us a complete scheme of taxation, title, or household budgeting. It does disrupt the assumption that ownership is a moral wall at which a neighbor's need must stop. When I hear a prayer that God would feed a hungry family, the prayer remains incomplete if those offering it have food, know the family, and intend to keep their assistance strictly verbal. The Didache joins confession before prayer to a pattern of material sharing. Repentance is not a sound heard in a service and forgotten at the offering plate.

The list of the Way of Death in chapter five has a terrible accumulation. Some vices are familiar. Others expose arrangements of social power: advocates for the rich, lawless judges of the poor, people who turn

away from those in want or afflict the distressed. The poor are not included simply as subjects of optional kindness. What happens to them becomes evidence of which way a society walks. A community cannot excuse its position by saying that its members personally favor mercy if it habitually supports policies that make the vulnerable pay for the powerful's security. I do not claim that the Didache contains an analysis of a modern budget or a particular war. I claim that it has a way of asking whose distress our judgments ignore.

The book's later question about Gaza arises here, before any disputed timetable of prophecy. The children killed there, the families displaced, the hostages taken by Hamas-led attackers, the fear of Jewish civilians, the Palestinian Christians worshiping amid destruction: these are persons before they are examples in my argument. Different agents bear different responsibility for violence. Moral seriousness requires distinguishing those responsibilities, not blending everyone into one accusation. It also requires a Christian to refuse the move by which one person's wrong erases another person's human claim. The Way of Life cannot be a private path through a landscape of disposable neighbors.

Chapter six warns that a teacher may turn someone away from the Way. Its advice about carrying the whole yoke, or as much as one can, is easy to misuse as permission to choose a comfortable fraction. In context it can also be heard as pastoral realism. Moral apprenticeship has degrees. The community is to begin with genuine obedience rather than abandon the road because perfection seems beyond reach. The food instruction allows some variation in practice and strongly cautions against food sacrificed to idols. Already the text distinguishes a central orientation from disputed exercises of it. A church can govern without making every variation a betrayal. It cannot make homicide, greed, or lovelessness a denominational preference.

I can imagine a pastor in a composite Sunday class placing a map on the table beside this manual. The map shows places we learned to call biblical. He circles a border, then marks the sites of an earlier kingdom. Someone asks about a family presently living within the circle. The pastor knows there are families there, but the diagram has no symbol for them. If the class were to read chapter five aloud first, it might ask about the poor and distressed as part of its interpretation of the land. That question would not by itself settle a modern territorial dispute. It would prevent the map from becoming the only moral instrument in the room.

The Two Ways are more demanding than a simple opposition of good people and bad people. Those are categories I could distribute to make myself innocent. The teaching repeatedly asks what I do with anger, speech, an unexpected request, a position of authority, a person I dislike. I have been closer to both paths than I would prefer to admit. A bad church habit is seldom introduced as the Way of Death. It arrives as convenience, as loyalty to a group, as fatigue with complexity, as a claim that we must finish the song before the question can be answered. The beginnings matter.

The language of two ways can sound intolerant to modern ears, and it can indeed be used badly. A leader may pronounce his own organization the road to life and every dissenter the road to death. That is the opposite of reading the lists carefully. The categories judge the reader's conduct before they identify an enemy outside the group. A person cannot infer his location from membership alone. A baptized insider may take bribes, nurse revenge, or despise a poor person. A stranger to the community may show generosity that rebukes him. The manual names the paths in order to form judgment, not to supply each religious faction with a permanent certificate of innocence.

The Two Ways form has a history larger than the Didache. It recalls Israel's scriptural choice between life and death, blessing and curse, and appears in other early Jewish and Christian instruction. Those continuities matter to me because a Christian claim to have discovered ethical seriousness after leaving

Judaism would be both false and spiritually arrogant. Jesus, the apostles, and the communities that preserved these teachings inhabited Israel's moral world. Their instruction about neighbor, justice, and the treatment of a stranger owes that world its vocabulary. Criticism of a modern state's conduct does not require a fantasy that Christian ethics stands alone, unindebted to Jewish teachers. In fact, that fantasy would make my own case less truthful.

The Didache's opening imperatives may once have formed catechumens over time. The text does not tell us exactly how a particular community used them, and its composition may join materials that circulated separately. But the sequence into baptism allows a plausible picture of instruction as preparation rather than an examination passed in a morning. A novice would learn what “do not bear false witness” means at a market stall and what “make peace” means in an offended household. The instruction would be repeated where someone could see whether it was learned. This is how moral knowledge differs from a memorized definition. If a church teaches children a weekly lesson about prophecy yet never gives them practice in examining a rumor before repeating it, it has cultivated recognition of vocabulary without the corresponding skill.

The line about a servant troubles me enough to keep it in view. I can admire the instruction to a master not to command harshly because both stand under one God. I cannot call the relation just because the text admonishes both parties within it. Later readers have used biblical household codes to defend slavery, and Christians who now recoil from that use should remember how an ancient norm was made to serve an institution of domination. That memory should make us modest when we declare that a modern state practice enjoys biblical permission. Scripture must be read through its whole moral argument, the neighbors affected, and the possibilities opened in Christ. The Didache's own incomplete reach on slavery is a warning against treating an early witness as an infallible policy manual.

There is also a subtler limit to a personal inventory of vices. One can refrain from individual theft and benefit from a system that dispossesses others. One can avoid lying in conversation and uncritically repeat the polished language of an institution. The Didache widens its scope with judges, advocates, and the afflicted, but it does not offer a full analysis of structural harm. Our task is to extend its attention responsibly. Who holds the power to define a need? Whose testimony reaches the room where a decision is made? Who pays the price when a policy is called temporary? These are not replacements for the old commands. They are questions by which the commands become answerable in a larger society.

The Didache's instruction against oath-taking deserves attention in a book about the authority of words. The second chapter places swearing near false witness, slander, and a double tongue. It does not elaborate the legal and political applications that Tolstoy would later draw from Jesus' teaching. Tolstoy came to see an oath to an army or government as a promise to surrender future moral judgment. The early manual's line cannot be made to prove all of that. It can ask why a Christian desires an impressive verbal guarantee while tolerating speech that changes according to the audience. The person who says “God told me” about a disputed political conclusion has made something functionally similar to an oath in the listener's mind. He has added a sacred guarantee to a claim whose supporting reasons may still be weak.

The catalog also forbids divination and the observing of omens. Christians sometimes dismiss these prohibitions as remote from a modern church and then scour an eclipse, a date, or a market crisis for a private divine signal. There are legitimate differences between biblical prophecy, ordinary attention to events, and forbidden divination. But the desire to bypass uncertain reasoning by possessing a sign can appear in each. If a preacher selects a disaster because it resembles an expected pattern and ignores another that does not, the method has more in common with reading omens than with hearing the text. A church

formed by the Two Ways can seek wisdom about its moment without claiming a secret certainty it has not earned.

One phrase in chapter four makes the community's obligation to speech more public: bring those at odds to peace and judge righteously without respect of persons. This is not a call to split every difference. The judge must discern who was wronged and what truth requires. A church that wants peace between peoples cannot simply ask them to stop making one another uncomfortable. It must listen to evidence, recognize unequal power, and make a just decision. The warning against partiality reaches me when I prefer to believe someone from my own tradition because the alternative would cost a friendship. It reaches a church when it treats a government it calls “biblical” as less capable of wrong than another. The ancient command has no exemption for a favored name.

Tolstoy was right to make the teaching walk. He was less secure when he treated the first five chapters as the essence so completely that the community's baptism, meal, offices, and hope appeared secondary. I will read those later chapters in turn. For now, the ancient document gives a congregation a first test. Ask whether its teaching helps people love the neighbor who can interrupt them. Ask whether it finds its prosperity in an open hand or a protected system. Ask what it teaches a child to admire. Ask whose wound the people can see after a worship service has ended. A road has no value to the traveler who keeps a perfect description of it on the bookshelf and stays where he is.

Chapter 8: Love the Enemy

The hardest command to say aloud in a frightened room may be the one Jesus placed near the center of the Sermon on the Mount: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. It becomes harder still when the room has already watched an atrocity. The attackers who killed Israeli civilians and abducted hostages on October 7, 2023 did not become good by being named as enemies to love. The command does not rename murder as misunderstanding. It addresses the follower of Jesus who, confronted with murder, is tempted to make hatred into a virtue. The distinction is costly and easy to blur. I want a reading that can condemn an attacker without preparing the next victim for moral erasure.

Matthew 5 gives the command in a sequence that opposes retaliation. The injured person is told not to answer insult by a matching blow. One who is pressed into service goes farther than compelled. A person should give and not turn away from the borrower. The culmination is not merely restraint but prayer for the adversary. Jesus grounds it in the indiscriminate generosity of the Father, whose sun and rain fall on people of different moral character. The point is not that all actions are morally equal. The same sermon condemns hypocrisy, falsehood, and lovelessness. The point is that the follower does not have permission to restrict benevolence to a circle of people who have first behaved well.

The Didache receives these instructions almost breathlessly at the beginning of its Way of Life. Bless the one who curses. Pray and fast for a persecutor. Turn the other cheek. Give to the person who asks. It does not treat enemy-love as an advanced elective for a rare saint after ordinary believers have completed the practical syllabus. It places the command before baptism, before decisions about who may teach, and before the final scene of persecution and betrayal. The sequence matters. The community cannot retain its identity during danger by suspending the very discipline with which it was formed.

Tolstoy found this sequence decisive. In his reading of Jesus, the instruction not to resist evil with violence was a command to be obeyed, not a poetic ideal to be celebrated while churches endorsed soldiers and courts of death. His objection to the state was not a romantic wish to abolish all coordination among people. It was the conviction that coercion, war, and punishment rested on the idea that one group may do collectively what each individual Christian knows is forbidden. An oath could bind a person in advance to kill someone not yet known, under orders he could not yet assess. Tolstoy refused to call such anticipatory surrender of conscience a Christian duty.

I agree with his refusal to let a public uniform transform a neighbor into an object. I do not imagine that repeating the command resolves every question about a policeman interrupting a murder or a parent shielding a child from a violent intruder. Critics of Tolstoy press these cases because they expose a real conflict among obligations. The person being attacked is also my neighbor. An ethic that speaks beautifully to the aggressor and leaves the victim unprotected has failed to complete its own sentence. The debate over force therefore deserves more than an easy assertion that every defender is a hidden aggressor. It requires a careful account of protection, proportionality, intention, and the limits of power.

Tolstoy would answer that violence used for protection educates a society to make exceptions so broad that it soon cannot tell protection from domination. The state invokes a threatened child, a vulnerable border, an endangered citizen, then maintains prisons, armies, conscription, censorship, and long campaigns whose victims include other children. That warning is difficult to dismiss. The hypothetical intervention at a doorway is not the same moral event as the bombardment of a city, and one does not gain moral authority for the latter by repeatedly invoking the former. If an absolute nonresistance troubles the reader, the trouble does not absolve a government of explaining each actual use of force.

There is another objection, voiced by people who have survived oppression: a privileged person can afford nonviolence because someone else bears the danger. A call to the exposed to accept harm from a safe observer can become a refined cruelty. My answer is to locate the first demand on my own loyalties and resources. If I am calling a persecuted person to forgive, I must not begin by withdrawing material support or a place of safety. Enemy-love prohibits me from using that person's pain as a warrant for indiscriminate retaliation. It does not entitle me to narrate the pain away. The neighbor under attack can ask for protection and accountability; the Christian community must attend to the request before it debates the moral purity of the requester's emotions.

Enemy-love is not agreement. Jesus denounced conduct and confronted power. The Didache warns against the Way of Death, instructs the community to reprove, and sets boundaries for false teachers. Love can demand the release of hostages, an end to the targeting of civilians, access for the hungry, and accountability for wrongdoing. It can refuse an invitation to chant a slogan that wishes a population's disappearance. What it cannot do is sort children into those who count and those who are fated collateral to a story we have already decided to tell.

In a church I knew, the language of love sometimes softened our speech only after the substance of our judgment had been settled. We could say that God loved everyone while arguing that certain suffering was the unavoidable sign of a scriptural plan. That is a way of being polite to a person in theory and indifferent in practice. The Didache's order exposes it. Prayer for an enemy is placed beside giving to a person who asks, not far away in a doctrine of universal goodwill. Fasting for a persecutor means surrendering something of one's own. Love has a cost visible to the one who professes it.

Tolstoy's reading of the Sermon is strongest when it names a mechanism of moral evasion. A Christian hears “turn the other cheek” and asks for an interpretation; an institution hears it and develops a category in which it need never obey. The soldier, the legislator, the voter, the pastor, and the professor each claims to inhabit an exception. The exceptions may differ in ethical weight. But if no one can identify a case in which the command would change public conduct, something has gone wrong in the interpretation. A command that can never interrupt a decision has ceased to command.

I have to test my own position by the same standard. It is easy for me to condemn a distant war while leaving the habits of my own anger untouched. In the composite church room, I can feel the pleasure of possessing a moral clarity my neighbor lacks. That pleasure is dangerous. It can make Palestinian lives into props in a case against Christians I resent, and Jewish fear into an obstacle that I would prefer to ignore. Enemy-love asks me to guard both against the state violence I oppose and against the dehumanizing convenience of my own side. I do not have to be neutral about an injustice to be truthful about everyone caught within it.

The command also changes how a Christian thinks about victory. A prophecy system can tempt believers to imagine a final arrangement of groups in which a chosen side prevails and the fate of the others is background. Jesus' images of God's generosity resist that narrowing. The person who will have to answer for a crime is still a human being. The victim does not become a dispensable step in the criminal's judgment. Neither is a population's survival conditional on its usefulness in my reading of Revelation. If I cannot name the enemy as a person for whom I can pray, I am probably already granting myself permissions the Way of Life denies.

Prayer can be another evasion when it substitutes for a decision in our control. It can also be a discipline against self-deception. To pray specifically for a hostage, a bereaved parent, a wounded child, a frightened civilian, or even the person who ordered harm is to resist the flattening of news into categories. The prayer

should make the person more visible. If it does the opposite—if “we pray for all sides” ends the discussion of a preventable famine or an indiscriminate strike—the prayer has been used to close one's eyes. The Didache's prayer for enemies belongs on the road, where one must keep walking after speaking.

The moral conversation about war includes traditions of Christian just war reasoning as well as pacifism and nonresistance. The former asks about a just cause, legitimate authority, last resort, proportionality, discrimination between combatants and civilians, and prospects of peace. These tests can become serious restrictions; they can also be recited as a ceremonial preface before a policy already desired. Tolstoy rejected the entire machinery because he believed it repeatedly converted Jesus' prohibition into an authorized exception. Even Christians who disagree with that absolute conclusion must answer his practical question: what war has our church opposed at a cost to its own political standing? What conduct by an ally would make our promised support end?

Those questions land with force when a church's language about Israel moves from solidarity with Jewish survival to unconditional defense of state action. Jewish people do not form a single political opinion, and the Israeli state is not identical to them. A Christian can oppose antisemitism, affirm the safety of Israeli civilians, demand the return of hostages, and still oppose the starvation or killing of Palestinian civilians. Indeed, the command to love an enemy requires such distinctions. If Christians cannot keep them, the church has allowed national allegiance to dictate its interpretation of love.

Matthew's command is not a theory that every aggressor can be persuaded by tenderness. Jesus himself was killed. The earliest Christian communities knew persecution; the Didache's final chapter expects it. Enemy-love is an allegiance formed in a world where innocence does not guarantee safety. That is part of its offense to ordinary calculation. It refuses to make the other person's deserving the foundation of one's conduct. Whether a state may use limited force to stop an attack remains a serious dispute. Whether a church may teach its people to enjoy hatred should not be.

I hear Tolstoy's impatience beside the ancient manual and my own memories of revival services. The question he leaves me is concrete: would we still speak of the Holy Land as we did if we had to pray aloud for a particular family living under each policy we cheered? Would our sermon remain intact if an enemy's child sat on the front pew? That child could not decide a complex conflict. The child could reveal the moral poverty of a sentence that had sounded sufficient before anyone gave it a face.

To love an enemy in political life, one must first resist the convenience of a single collective face. “The Israelis” may name a government, soldiers, civilians, protesters, a hostage family, and people opposing the government; the phrase can make them sound like one will. “The Palestinians” can similarly erase the difference among armed groups, Christians, Muslims, secular organizers, parents, children, and political rivals. No nation is a person with one conscience. An ethic that starts from actual neighbors must distinguish agents. I can hold a government responsible for an operation without charging every Jewish person with its acts. I can oppose the oppression of Palestinians without defending every action claimed in their name. Enemy-love becomes clearer when false collectives break apart into human lives and accountable institutions.

The distinction also guards against a cheap evenhandedness. To say that every person bears God's image does not mean every person controls the same resources or inflicts the same injury. Loving two adversaries does not require me to assign them equal causal responsibility for each event. A parent and an armed institution may each require truthful moral speech, but they do not occupy symmetrical positions. A rhetoric that says “both sides” whenever the evidence points to an identifiable decision can evade judgment under the cover of charity. Jesus' command forbids contempt; it does not forbid description. I can name the

person who ordered a blockade, the person who abducted a civilian, and the person who denies food while refusing to declare their whole communities guilty.

There are practices by which a church can train this speech. Read testimony from people directly affected and identify whose account is being reported. Ask what can be verified and what remains uncertain. Refuse images whose context is unknown even when they favor the cause one supports. In a public prayer, name the kinds of suffering and the protection sought instead of using a vague “peace” that leaves every violent policy intact. When advocating a government action, state the likely effects on the powerless and the legal and moral tests the action must meet. These are small disciplines, but they are more faithful than the pleasure of belonging to a camp whose every news item confirms its righteousness.

Tolstoy's refusal of violence puts pressure on the Christian even where one does not accept his absolute rule. Suppose a person argues that limited force may protect civilians. Then the argument must retain its limits when fear rises. It must be able to say no to the killing of noncombatants, to the punishment of a population for a group's acts, to the use of starvation, and to deliberate humiliation. It must be open to ceasefire, negotiation, and investigation even if an adversary has also committed atrocities. If each restriction is lifted as soon as it becomes inconvenient, the claimed permission to protect has turned into permission to dominate. Tolstoy's severe question remains valuable because it demands that each exception be defended without a blanket appeal to necessity.

I can imagine a conversation after church in which a friend says that loving an enemy is too much to ask of a hostage's family. I would agree that I cannot command the pace of a grieving person's inner life. The injunction comes first to me, standing outside that family's loss, and to the institutions asking me to authorize retaliation in their name. The family's grief is not a political blank check I may write. Neither is a Palestinian parent's grief. To honor either is to listen carefully and seek protection without turning another family into an acceptable payment.

One difficulty in invoking Tolstoy for a contemporary war is that his theology was more than a set of restrictions on military means. He challenged the making of national identity into an object of devotion. A church that endorses the most carefully limited campaign yet asks its members to regard one nation as the permanent executor of God's will has already given its allegiance a dangerous shape. That is why his critique belongs beside the Didache's enemy-love. The question is not only whether a particular strike meets a legal standard. It is whether Christians have learned to identify their own moral future with the victory of an armed state. Once that identification takes hold, evidence of the state's wrongdoing can feel like an attack on faith itself. The church should be free to judge a state, including a state it loves, precisely because it worships someone else.

A common objection says that a command as demanding as enemy-love would make any society unable to survive. We should not pretend that the historical record supplies a simple proof either way. Nonviolent movements have achieved change in some circumstances and failed or suffered grievously in others; armed defense has stopped some attacks and caused others. The Christian question is not settled by a single success story. It begins with the recognition that means reshape those who use them. A congregation that becomes habituated to defending the killing of a whole population for the sake of its own security has not merely adopted a policy. It has undergone formation. The Didache asks which way the formation takes it, even where members still disagree about the permissible use of force.

The way to love an enemy is not to pretend that no one is an enemy. It is to let the neighbor's humanity place limits on what fear, anger, loyalty, and political prediction authorize us to do. The limits must hold precisely when we most want to set them aside. I cannot infer a complete foreign policy from the first

chapter of the Didache. I can infer that a church which reads it must feel a check upon every policy that asks it to stop seeing the human beings at the other end of its support.

Chapter 9: Money, Greed, and Hospitality

A congregation can make a visitor feel welcome before it has decided whether it will share anything costly. The greeting at the door is warm. The coffee is poured. Someone will find an empty chair. Then the visitor asks for a bed, work, medical care, or a way to cross an unfamiliar town. The church must discover whether hospitality means the warmth of a Sunday greeting or the use of time, space, and money over the following week. The Didache knows this discovery can hurt. It gives instructions for both receiving a stranger and recognizing an opportunist. Its Christian household is neither a locked room nor a bottomless purse.

There is a small economic drama in its first chapter. Give, it says. The person in genuine need is not to be shamed for receiving. The one who takes without need will answer for it. The donor, too, must attend to where a gift goes. These are different moral agents, and the document refuses the convenient thought that one party's possible dishonesty releases the other from generosity. When churches tell stories about a person who once misused assistance, I want to know what conclusion they draw. Do they develop a better way to help? Or do they retain the story because it allows them to close the door without admitting that they have closed it?

The fourth chapter turns the question toward possession itself. If something is in my hand, I should share. If I participate with another believer in what is eternal, how could I insist that what is perishable belongs to me alone? The text does not specify the number of dollars to give or the legal form of property. Its severity lies in the refusal to let property end the argument. The ordinary sentence “It is mine” describes one kind of relation to a thing. It is not a final judgment about how I ought to use it when another person is hungry. The Didache does not require me to be imprudent in order to require me to be answerable.

Tolstoy pressed this implication far beyond respectable philanthropy. As a wealthy landowner, he had reason to feel the conflict in his own body. The arrangement that made it possible for him to write, own, eat, and employ was not a neutral backdrop to an ethical theory. His writings on labor, property, and poverty charged that one group lived from another group's work while speaking of charity as if occasional gifts redeemed the relation. He repeatedly tried to align his life with that judgment, though his household, his estate, and his obligations to his family exposed tensions he did not simply solve. His inconsistency can be examined without using it to declare his question invalid. I have found that criticism of a wealthy person's imperfect renunciation is often voiced by people who do not intend any renunciation at all.

In the Didache, greed is placed near lies, theft, hypocrisy, and injustice toward the poor. This grouping should alter a congregation's diagnosis of wrongdoing. A small theft is readily preached against because the injured owner is identifiable. A practice that extracts from hundreds of people while obeying a legal form can be called success. The ancient text cannot provide an answer to every modern market question, but it knows that desire for money affects truth-telling and the way a community judges people. Its instruction to judges is especially pointed: do not favor the rich, do not turn away from the poor, do not afflict the distressed. The church's economic teaching is incoherent if it polices the desperate person's dishonesty and admires the prosperous person's indifference.

Tolstoy's anti-property argument can seem to demand an impossible purity in a household that has rent, medicine, and children to feed. I will not pretend that a woman working two jobs has the same choices as a man holding an inherited estate. Nor will I turn a passage about sharing into a demand that people surrender their last means of independence to an institution. A church could seize on such a teaching to make the poor dependent on its leadership. The Didache's own instructions concerning money paid to teachers offer a warning against this abuse. Economic discipleship should make the powerful less secure in their claims to

abundance and the vulnerable more secure in their means of life. If an interpretation reverses those results, we need to ask whose interests have guided it.

Chapter eleven tests traveling apostles and prophets partly by their relation to food and money. Receive a visitor. Allow a night or, if necessary, another. If the visitor stretches the stay into exploitation or asks for money as a spiritual entitlement, do not mistake the demand for prophetic authority. The instruction assumes movement between communities and the need for local people to open homes. It also assumes that a pious vocabulary can conceal appetite. One can be hospitable without allowing a person who invokes God to consume a household's labor indefinitely.

The test becomes more complex in chapter thirteen. A genuine prophet who settles among the people is worthy of support, as is a teacher. First fruits of produce may be given to them. If no prophet is present, give to the poor. The difference between a stranger demanding cash at departure and an established teacher supported by the community is important. The Didache is not saying that anyone who receives money for religious work is false. It is asking whether the exchange reflects a recognized service, accountable life, and communal judgment, or a self-authorized demand made under cover of the Spirit. That distinction could still help a church confronted by an itinerant personality whose message becomes more urgent as the offering grows.

The appeal that “the laborer is worthy of support” is sound. Teaching, visiting the sick, maintaining a place of worship, and giving a pastor time to read and pray all cost something. But when the spiritual authority of the person receiving the money prevents questions about how it is used, support has become submission. The Didache's travelers are not above examination because they speak with intensity. A local leader's salary and expenses should be legible to the people who give. A lavish ministry should be able to explain itself in the presence of a family that cannot afford rent. The question is not whether an institution may possess a building or pay a worker. It is whether its budget tells the truth about the Way of Life it professes.

Chapter twelve addresses the traveler who comes in the Lord's name. Receive and test the visitor; assist a wayfarer for a limited time; if an artisan wishes to stay, let that person work and eat. If the person has no trade, the community should find some way to prevent idle dependence. The sharper word often translated “Christ-monger” names the trade in religious identity for material advantage. The modern reader may be inclined to turn the passage into a slogan against anyone seeking refuge or benefits. That would ignore the prior imperatives to receive and assist. The document regulates a small network of traveling Christians under particular conditions. It cannot be copied wholesale into a policy for millions of displaced people, many of whom cannot lawfully work, are injured, care for children, or flee with nothing. The first act remains welcome; the judgment about sustained support requires knowledge of the actual person.

Hospitality is especially difficult when people cross the lines by which we usually sort obligation. A church in Kansas might be proud of a food pantry and impatient with a report from a Palestinian parish. The distance changes what we can do directly, but it does not make the other parish imaginary. The earliest communities exchanged travelers, gifts, and words across places they had never visited. A contemporary church has far more means to learn about another congregation and far less excuse for turning its members into symbols. It may discover that a Christian family in Bethlehem wants access to work, water, and safety more urgently than a prophecy teacher's explanation of their role in an end-times plan.

The economic language of the Way of Life also alters how I hear claims about sacred land. A promise concerning land cannot be interpreted as if households currently cultivating, buying, inheriting, renting, or losing homes there had no moral claim. That does not settle competing national histories or legal rights. It does put any proposed interpretation under the commands against theft, false witness, favoritism, and

affliction of the poor. If a Christian argument for one people's possession requires indifference to another family's dispossession, the burden of explanation is heavy. The prophetic significance assigned to a place cannot dissolve a neighbor into an obstacle.

A composite scene occurs to me: after a service, a visitor gives the church a report about a clinic that has run short of medicine. The pastor listens kindly. Someone offers to pray. Later the finance committee spends forty minutes debating whether an expensive screen should be replaced before the next special week of revival. There may be practical reasons for the screen. The church need not sell all equipment the moment a request arrives. But if the clinic's need disappears from the minutes and the screen receives a line in the budget, the order of attention is itself a piece of theology. A receipt can testify to a priority more reliably than an emotional prayer.

This may sound like a quarrel about charity rather than doctrine. It is also a quarrel about the use of religious time. One can spend a decade charting future kingdoms while allowing the institutions of present life to evade judgment. The Didache's list gives no one that freedom. A teacher who correctly describes an apocalyptic sign and takes money under false pretenses still fails. A believer who can defend a land promise and close a door to the hungry still has not mastered the first chapter. To call these issues practical is not to lower their theological status. Practice is where a community's actual doctrine becomes visible.

Tolstoy sometimes drew the line so sharply between the kingdom of God and existing property relations that he could leave little room for a modest, trustworthy institution. The Didache gives me a better balance without relaxing the demand. It directs regular offerings, recognizes real teachers, accommodates travelers, permits labor, and appoints local officers who must not love money. It has a small economy of gifts and duties. It cannot be reduced to an ideal of pure spontaneity. Nor does it imagine that a professionally managed charity could replace the obligation to know and serve one's neighbor. Its hospitality requires a face, a visit, a decision, and often a continuing relation.

The test of a Christian budget is therefore not simply its percentage assigned to benevolence. Categories can conceal as much as they reveal. Does the church ask what recipients say they need? Does it make help conditional on a performance of gratitude or doctrinal agreement? Does it sustain work that makes vulnerable people less vulnerable, or only spectacles that make donors feel generous? Does it tolerate financial secrecy from leaders while demanding intimate disclosure from those seeking assistance? The Didache does not answer the accounting questions, but its disciplines change who is permitted to ask them and what kinds of answer should trouble us.

I cannot write about greed as if I stood outside it. The desire to keep what is comfortable is not limited to a prosperous pastor. I know the relief of sending a contribution and feeling my responsibility has been discharged. I know how readily a person committed to a political cause can prefer the image that confirms his judgment over the patient work of learning what a family actually needs. Tolstoy's demand that one examine the source of one's own comfort has a way of making moral criticism less theatrical. It asks me to look at my table, my labor, my money, and the people who prepared what I use.

First fruits were not an abstract pledge to feel grateful. The Didache names wine, grain, animals, bread dough, clothing, and money. The donor transfers something that can actually be consumed or used. It first imagines prophets receiving support, and then the poor when there is no prophet. This small change in recipient is striking: the gift remains required by the logic of sharing even without a religious specialist to justify an institutional collection. A church that builds a large budget for its own religious programming while leaving no direct channel of aid to the poor should hear that conditional line closely. It is possible to

fund teachers faithfully; it is not possible to make the institution's need the only need the community can see.

The ancient economy assumed forms of household production very different from ours. Not every modern Christian has a winepress or a field. Wage earners, pensioners, and caregivers live by different distributions of money and labor. A literal tenth or first portion cannot be applied without asking what remains after basic needs and who in the household has control of the income. The Didache speaks to the money lover, not only to the person with a modest paycheck. A congregation should be wary of a fundraising appeal that treats the struggling worker's last dollars as a test of faith while the prosperous donor receives a naming opportunity and a tax strategy. The document's ethical line runs through the treatment of both.

Tolstoy's own relation to money made him an imperfect witness with an unusually acute wound. He inherited privilege and wrote from it. His efforts to change his life implicated a wife and children who did not necessarily choose the same renunciation. A radical moral vision can become another way a man asks others to bear the cost of his purity. That does not settle the argument for comfortable ownership. It asks him and us to account for the labor of people closest to the act of renunciation. If a pastor declares the church's goods common but unpaid women perform every meal and every cleaning, the household has not overcome greed. It has moved its costs to those least able to invoice them.

In my own work, a budget can serve as an experimental record. A church's mission statement describes the hypothesis; its spending reveals an aspect of the actual practice. But financial data require interpretation. The rent of a building that shelters people is not simply waste, and the salary of a worker who organizes care is not theft from the poor. The questions are relational: who can see the figures, who makes the decisions, what costs have been hidden in volunteered labor, and what follows when a poor member asks for an allocation that inconveniences an influential donor? Numbers do not judge themselves. They can keep a claim from escaping all contact with evidence.

The demand for hospitality reaches beyond a discretionary fund. A visitor may need someone to complete a form, translate a letter, accompany a medical appointment, or sit through an anxious evening. A person can donate to a relief organization and still need to learn the name of the neighbor whose circumstances do not fit an application. Conversely, intimate help alone cannot supply a damaged city's water system. The early household's small scale gives us an ethic of attention; modern public systems and international relief can carry that attention farther than a kitchen table. A responsible church should not use the intimacy of charity to oppose institutions capable of saving more people, or use institutions as an excuse to avoid a neighbor it can serve directly.

The word “greed” is familiar enough to lose its force. We can picture a cartoonish person piling up gold and miss the ordinary defenses of our own surplus. Greed can be the refusal to let a stranger's claim disturb a promised upgrade, the insistence that every risk to comfort outweighs a large risk borne elsewhere, or the belief that an ally's prosperity proves God's endorsement. The Didache does not ask how rich a person looks. It asks what happens to the hand when it is time to give and to the mouth when a needy person is discussed. A person can give publicly and still arrange the gift so that the recipient remains permanently grateful and powerless. Generosity without attention to dignity can become a form of possession.

In chapter twelve, “receive everyone who comes in the name of the Lord” precedes “prove and know” the visitor. The order is significant. If the test of worthiness must be completed before someone is offered shelter, many legitimate travelers will never pass through the door. If no test ever follows, a vulnerable household can be exploited. Hospitality is a process in time: first safety and food, then inquiry, then a sustainable arrangement. One can imagine a contemporary congregation providing a short stay, arranging

work where lawful and possible, and establishing a transparent process for further help. The ancient manual does not supply the forms; it supplies the moral sequence that keeps both panic and naivety from governing the welcome.

The first-fruits instruction creates another sequence. A gift goes to a true teacher, or to the poor in the teacher's absence. What if the teacher is present but corrupt? The text's earlier test would deny the person the status on which the gift depends. Its chapters must be read together. It would be absurd to identify an exploitative prophet in chapter eleven and continue paying him in chapter thirteen out of reverence for the office. That is precisely the absurdity modern religious institutions can sustain when one department verifies a leader's status, another receives the money, and a third hears complaints without connecting them. The Didache's small household has the advantage of seeing these facts in the same room. A larger church needs deliberate ways to reconnect them.

Hospitality begins there. It opens the table but also takes the stranger seriously enough to learn whether there is a trade, a wound, a family, a place to go next. It can set a boundary without withdrawing the recognition of a person. It can pay a teacher without making the teacher unaccountable. It can give to the poor without turning poverty into an occasion for the giver's self-display. The early manual is exacting because it knows how easily money enters the space between profession and action. It also knows that the gift of a room, a meal, and work may be part of how a church keeps the Way open for someone else.

Chapter 10: Test the Prophet

When a visitor claims to speak for God, courtesy pulls one way and caution another. Refuse the person too quickly and one may close the door on a true teacher. Welcome without question and the household may become the instrument of a fraud. The Didache takes both possibilities seriously. Chapter eleven begins by welcoming one who teaches the Way already received. It then tells the community not to hear a person who turns toward destructive teaching. Its measure is not the intensity of the visitor's experience or the originality of a revelation. It is the received teaching and the effect of the new message upon the community's righteousness.

That measure sounds simple until we ask who has learned the received teaching well enough to use it. In churches I knew, many members were trained to recognize a prophetic atmosphere more readily than a sound argument. The music could prepare the room. A speaker could describe a vision, pause while the congregation murmured approval, and place an interpretation of current events inside the expectation of a supernatural message. Someone might know a passage well enough to question a detail but not feel free to interrupt. The more intense the room became, the more like an act of unbelief the question felt. The Didache, written among communities that took prophets seriously, nevertheless gives ordinary believers a responsibility to judge conduct.

It contains a difficult warning against testing a prophet who speaks in the Spirit, associated with the sin against the Spirit. A hurried reading could make spiritual speech immune from scrutiny. The very next lines prevent that conclusion: not everyone who speaks in the Spirit is a prophet; the authentic one is recognized by the Lord's ways. The text distinguishes presumptuous judgment of a genuine gift from the discernment without which the community cannot survive. I do not claim the tension is entirely neat. It reflects an early community working with both reverence for spiritual speech and firsthand experience of exploitation. The answer is not to abolish prophecy in the name of safety or to make it unanswerable in the name of faith.

The tests are startlingly ordinary. A traveling apostle may stay a day or two if there is need; a third day exposes an abusive pattern. A person who asks for money on departure discredits the claim to apostolic service. A prophet who teaches the truth but does not do it is false. A person who calls for a meal under inspiration and then eats it is suspect in the rule as translated, though the precise ancient practice behind that test is obscure. One who asks in the Spirit for a gift for himself must not be obeyed, while a call to give for others in need is treated differently. The community's discernment passes through appetite, duration, and consistency between words and deeds. It does not require a hidden dossier explaining the prophet's secret ancestry or the supposed conspirators behind his work.

That is an important distinction for this book. Cyrus Scofield's annotations can be criticized through their printed claims, their history, and their consequences. The church does not need a sensational story about a benefactor in a private club to decide whether a note on Abraham's descendants is a good guide to the New Testament. Some biographical questions are worth asking and documenting. They are not substitutes for reading the text. The Didache's practical test keeps the critic as well as the prophet honest. If I invent a connection because it would make my argument more dramatic, I am speaking falsely against the person I oppose. That is a failure of the Way of Life even if the person's theology is also wrong.

A study Bible is different from an itinerant prophet. Its editor does not arrive at the door asking for bread. The analogy lies in delegated authority. The printed note is a teacher whose visit can last decades. It enters bedrooms, classrooms, pulpits, and family devotions. A reader may hesitate to question it because the note is bound to a Bible, just as a small community might hesitate to question a charismatic speaker who comes

in the Lord's name. The Didache's rule says that the presence of spiritual language is a reason to take the claim seriously, and therefore a reason to examine the life and teaching to which the claim directs us. It does not ask the faithful to surrender their capacity to think.

The nature of testing matters. A preacher may be modest, generous, and kind while holding a mistaken interpretation of a difficult passage. Character does not magically resolve exegesis. Another may offer a correct observation about a verse and treat people under his care cruelly. Accuracy does not redeem cruelty. The Didache's test includes both what is taught and how the teacher lives. A present-day congregation should therefore ask two questions that must not cancel each other: Is this reading supported by the text in its context? What sort of action, relationship, and use of money does the teaching produce? A chart can be internally elegant and publicly dangerous. A speaker can be compelling and wrong.

There is a temptation to apply the conduct test only to figures we already distrust. If the pastor favors a political position I share, I may excuse secret finances and bad treatment of a critic because I call his mission urgent. If the pastor opposes me, one hurried sentence is enough to condemn him. The ancient instruction to judge without partiality in chapter four belongs beside the later instructions on teachers. A real test has criteria that can embarrass my allies. I cannot accuse a Scofield reader of surrendering judgment to a note while treating every statement by Tolstoy or Stephen Sizer as automatically sound. Sizer's biblical challenges to Christian Zionism deserve examination on their merits; a Church of England tribunal's later finding that his sharing of a 9/11 conspiracy article was antisemitic must also be faced. The moral test is useful precisely when it prevents me from protecting someone because he serves my argument.

Tolstoy applied his own test to the established church with ruthless consistency, at least in principle. He asked whether a body that teaches the commands of Jesus may bless an army, sanctify an execution, or participate in state coercion. Clerical credentials and ancient offices could not answer the question for him. The Didache supports his skepticism toward a teacher who fails to live what he says, yet it does not support a simple elimination of offices. Chapter fifteen instructs communities to appoint bishops and deacons who are meek, truthful, proven, and free from love of money. They serve alongside the prophets and teachers and deserve honor. An office may help a community preserve a practice, but the document refuses to let the office replace a recognizable life.

The comparison can embarrass a contemporary church in more than one direction. Some independent ministries boast that they answer to the Spirit instead of an institution, while their leaders have fewer checks than an established congregation would require. Some denominational bodies have formal procedures and defend officeholders long after the people most affected have reported serious harm. Neither freedom from bureaucracy nor possession of a policy is enough. The question is whether the vulnerable can tell the truth, receive an impartial hearing, and see conduct corrected. A handbook may be useful. A household of people who have learned to turn away from a wounded person can make the handbook useless.

Consider a prophecy conference that sells admission, takes a large offering, and tells a crowd which contemporary nation God commands it to support. The commerce alone does not prove deception: a venue, travel, and printing cost money. Yet the event ought to pass tests beyond the excitement it creates. Can attendees examine the use of funds? Are rival readings of Scripture accurately presented? Do local Jewish and Palestinian lives enter the argument as lives, or only as evidence for a scheme? When a projected date passes or a confident prediction fails, does the speaker acknowledge the error publicly? A leader who can

make urgent claims without accepting correction has arranged a relationship that the Didache's communities were instructed to resist.

Imagine a composite church scene in which a guest teacher proposes that a modern diplomatic agreement may begin a prophetic countdown. During the sermon, people nod. At the door, the narrator asks which verse gives the agreement that role. The answer is a chain of allusions, each dependent on the previous one. It is possible to disagree politely, but the social structure favors the visitor: the stage, the microphone, the host pastor's introduction, the book table, the respect owed to an elder. A question can feel like a breach of manners. The Didache would have recognized the asymmetry. Its instructions are a way for the hosts, not only the celebrated traveler, to retain a moral voice.

A congregation that tests teachers needs habits established before a charismatic visitor comes. Members should know the Gospels well enough to notice when a doctrine asks them to suspend Jesus' commands. They should hear Scripture read beyond an isolated verse. They should practice disagreement among themselves without treating questions as rebellion. Financial decisions need a regular account. A complaint about harm must have a path that does not require the injured person to submit privately to the person accused. These arrangements do not manufacture holiness. They reduce the opportunities by which a claim to holiness can conceal a failure of it.

The hardest test may be whether the preacher welcomes his own correction. I can imagine myself preaching this chapter and enjoying the fact that it exposes someone else's susceptibility. Then a listener says that I have described a Palestinian family's suffering without checking their own words, or that I have allowed Tolstoy to speak for the entire Didache, or that I have used a claim about a historical figure that I cannot document. If I retreat into the status of author or professor, I have learned nothing from the manual. The person who names a real error has performed a service. The claim that my intention was honorable is not a reason to leave the error standing.

This does not require a community to investigate every unsettling utterance as if it were a trial. Trust is part of life. A teacher cannot explain every presupposition in every sermon. The Didache asks for prudent, repeated observation. A visitor's first day is a welcome; the next day may reveal a pattern. One sermon can be heard in the context of a longer record. The congregation should neither mistake ordinary imperfection for fraud nor protect a sustained abuse because the person's first arrival was moving. The ancient rules are terse because the people in the house still have to make judgments together.

A good teacher leaves people more capable of reading when the teacher has gone home. Scofield's notes sometimes did the opposite by making a system seem to settle a passage before a reader encountered its difficulty. Tolstoy's version of the Didache could also do so if his moral selection became the final word and the remaining chapters disappeared. I want a teacher who introduces the text, admits a difficult line, distinguishes evidence from conjecture, and lets the listener's responsibility increase. The presence of an accomplished guide should deepen judgment rather than replace it.

The warning to test a prophet finally reaches beyond religious professionals. A movement can speak prophetically through an institution, a slogan, or an alliance. “Stand with Israel” can mean a refusal of antisemitism and a commitment to Jewish safety. It can also be used to demand a blank check for a government's actions. “Free Palestine” can mean equal rights and protection for a people living under domination. It can also be used by someone who excuses attacks on Jewish civilians. The words require attention to the speaker's actions and the policy being requested. A church that has learned to test can affirm a just claim within a movement without adopting the movement's every utterance. That discipline is hard work, especially when belonging to a side offers emotional relief.

The ancient distinction between a teacher's doctrine and a teacher's life has a technical analogue: an instrument can be well calibrated on one measure and defective on another. A charismatic minister may accurately recall biblical genealogies and misrepresent an opponent's position. A scholar may offer historical corrections while taking liberties with a story that serves his thesis. A critic of nationalism may overlook national hatred in his own audience. These failures differ, and they call for different responses. If the error is corrigible, correct it. If a person refuses correction and profits from the falsehood, the community has learned something about trust. Discernment needs a record, not a sudden declaration that a person is either wholly true or wholly false.

The Didache's criterion “teaches the truth but does not do it” is especially exacting for an author who writes about Gaza from Kansas. I can urge readers to listen to Palestinian Christians and then rely only on voices that echo my conclusion. I can oppose a theology that turns Jewish people into instruments of Christian prophecy and then make them instruments in an argument against that theology. It is not enough to have the right principle in a paragraph. The research method, the manner of naming persons, and the willingness to qualify a claim are also deeds. That is why the evidence ledger at the end of this book separates what is documented from what I infer. An honest uncertainty can protect a living neighbor from my appetite for a more dramatic account.

Testing should be open to the congregation but not made into mob judgment. A person accused of misconduct deserves notice of the allegation and an opportunity to respond. A vulnerable person should not have to expose an intimate injury before a crowd to be taken seriously. Some matters call for independent investigation and civil authority, not a vote after a sermon. The Didache gives principles of reception and reproof within a small ancient community. We honor its concern for truth better by developing careful procedures for circumstances it does not describe than by copying its brief rules as though they covered every modern abuse.

There is a difference between a dissenting interpretation and destructive teaching. A visitor who reads Romans 11 differently from me has not thereby become a false prophet. I must state his strongest case and identify exactly where my inference diverges. A visitor who claims spiritual permission to lie, extort, or wish harm on civilians has crossed another line. In the first case the community can argue, learn, and perhaps remain divided without expulsion. In the second, it must protect people from a harmful demand. If every disagreement is called heresy, leaders become untestable. If every harmful demand is called an interesting perspective, the vulnerable are abandoned. The Didache requires the hard work of distinguishing the two.

I would also ask what a ministry does after its most exciting evening. Is there time for a listener to ask a question without being treated as a threat? Can someone who bought a book return it when a claim proves false? Does the visiting teacher leave local relationships strengthened or strained? Are a handful of people left to perform weeks of unpaid work for a spectacle advertised as revival? The ancient limit on the visitor's stay may be foreign to our conferences, but it knows that the cost of a charismatic appearance is often borne by the household after the guest has gone.

The printing press gives the visitor another life. A claim can be repeated by people who never met its originator; a study Bible can outlive the editor and the first context in which a note made sense. This durability deserves gratitude when the work is careful and correction when it is misleading. I can place Scofield's annotation about Israel and the church beside the biblical chapter and invite readers to examine both. I cannot interrogate the dead man as the Didache's hosts could question a traveler. The living teachers who keep his notes in circulation bear a present responsibility to identify them as an interpretation,

acknowledge alternatives, and correct uses that excuse cruelty. Historical influence is not inherited guilt, but the choice to teach today is a contemporary act.

The same principle applies to this book. An authorial voice becomes an authority by being bound between covers. Readers may accept a sentence because it sounds researched, especially when the endnotes and bibliography lie many pages away. That places an obligation on me to make a contestable argument rather than dramatize a certainty I do not possess. If I say that an institution funded Scofield or that a club arranged Oxford's publication, I need evidence of that act. Shared acquaintance and chronological proximity do not establish it. If I use a composite church scene, I need to say that it is composite. These rules do not make the writing timid. They allow a strong moral judgment to rest on a record that can be tested.

The Didache's small house receives the traveler, feeds him, watches him, and may send him away. It neither worships his charisma nor begins by assuming he is an enemy. I would like churches to recover that freedom. Then a teacher could be thanked for opening a passage and still be asked for evidence. A title on a book cover would not settle an argument. A note printed beneath Scripture would remain visible as a note. The community's loyalty would be to the Way and to the Lord whose teaching made the Way possible. Every other voice, including mine, would have to bear examination.

Chapter 11: Baptism, Bread, and the Household

The journey from the first six chapters into the seventh is only a turn of the page. The person who has heard the teaching of the Two Ways is to be baptized. That order is easy to miss when the Didache is treated as a collection of interesting fragments. Moral instruction precedes the water. The water then marks entry into a community that prays, fasts, eats, receives visitors, appoints leaders, and waits for its Lord. The ancient writer did not imagine an isolated ethical individual keeping the first five chapters as a personal creed while the rest of the community's life remained optional scenery.

Chapter seven instructs baptism in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, preferably in living water. If running water is unavailable, another source will do; cold is preferred, warm permitted; if immersion in water is impossible, water may be poured three times over the head. The baptizer and the person to be baptized are to fast, with others joining if they can. This is a remarkably practical hierarchy of options. A mountain stream is not a requirement that bars a convert in a dry region. The command retains a recognizable form while adjusting to conditions. It is neither rigid ritualism nor a declaration that the physical act does not matter.

A Pentecostal Christian may instinctively connect living water to the Spirit, and the metaphor is biblical. In this instruction, however, “living” also describes a kind of water one can use. The text cares about the actual act and its material setting. It does not offer an elaborate theory of what baptism accomplishes, and Christians later developed differing accounts of that question. It does show that admission to this community was not merely an inward moment of decision. Someone taught, someone prepared, someone fasted, someone found water, and a community could recognize the result. Whatever I think about Tolstoy's criticism of later sacramental power, I cannot erase this chapter to make the earliest church consist only of privately obeying an ethical law.

Tolstoy's version treated the opening moral instruction as sufficient for recognition of Christ's truth and the salvation of the soul. He mentioned the rest as arrangements for disciples' common life. There is insight in refusing to mistake a ceremony for obedience. A person can be baptized and still nurse hatred. The Didache itself puts teaching before the act and later requires reconciliation before the communal meal. Yet its practical answer to hollow ritual is a life worthy of the ritual, not the absence of the ritual. The moral and the communal form one sequence. The distinction matters because an entirely privatized conscience can become unanswerable to anyone except itself.

Chapter eight puts time under discipline. Fasting days differ from those of other religious practitioners whom the text calls hypocrites. It gives the Lord's Prayer and directs its use three times a day. The boundary around fasting days reflects an early community locating itself in relation to other Jewish practices; Christians should not use that ancient differentiation to caricature Jews as hypocritical or imagine Jesus' prayer had no Jewish roots. The prayer itself asks that God's will be done on earth, that daily bread be given, debts forgiven, and evil resisted. If repeated attentively, it is a recurring interruption of the day. The Christian who asks for daily bread while approving a policy that blocks another family's bread ought to feel the contradiction each time the words return.

Fixed prayer may sound strange in a church accustomed to spontaneity. The Pentecostal services I knew valued words that seemed to arrive unplanned. That freedom can be a gift. It can also let a meeting circle repeatedly around the concerns that come most easily to the loudest voices. A prayer learned from Jesus supplies words when feeling is absent and questions the speaker's priorities when feeling is abundant. The Didache permits a disciplined rhythm within a community that also honors prophets who give thanks

freely. The opposition between a living Spirit and repeated words is too neat for this early document. It expects both form and freedom, with neither excusing a person from the Way.

The prayers over cup and broken bread in chapters nine and ten are unlike the institutional formula many Christians expect. They give thanks for the holy vine of David, for life and knowledge made known through Jesus, for food and drink and the spiritual gift of life. The broken bread, gathered from what was scattered, becomes an image of a church gathered from the ends of the earth. The prayer after the meal asks that the church be delivered from evil and made perfect in love. The text refers to this thanksgiving as Eucharist and limits participation to the baptized. Scholars debate the relation of these prayers to a full meal, later Eucharistic forms, and whether the document transmits one community's usage rather than a universal pattern. It is enough for our purposes to notice that eating, thanksgiving, and a bounded communal identity belong to its Way of Life.

I resist a temptation to use the word “table” as if it answered every ecclesial question. An ordinary dinner with friends is not, by becoming warm and inclusive, identical with the Eucharist. The Didache's cup, bread, baptismal boundary, prayer, and Sunday assembly have their own sacred grammar. Nor should “household” suggest that a grandmother's authority over a family was automatically the authority to baptize or preside over a congregation. The analogy I find useful is more limited and more concrete. A grandmother who keeps a table can remember who has not arrived, prepare enough for an unexpected guest, halt a quarrel before it destroys a meal, teach children by repeating what the family does, and know whether a visitor is safe with a vulnerable member. Her authority is exercised in acts of attention. A church that has elaborate credentials and no such attention lacks something an office alone cannot supply.

The analogy can also mislead if we romanticize family. A table can enforce silence and protect an abuser. A grandmother may be generous to her own and prejudiced toward a stranger. Home is not automatically holy because its scale is small. The early households had social hierarchies, including masters and servants; some hosts controlled the means by which others were received. The Didache's instructions to masters and servants show that Christians could reproduce the inequalities of their world while preaching a common Lord. We need both the intimacy of the table and the courage to ask who does the labor, who may speak, and who has a secure place when family affection fails.

The prayer over the scattered bread is wider than a family. The church is to be gathered from the ends of the earth. This was no metaphorical warrant for a church to gather every territory under its control. It was a petition that a people formed by Christ might be one. The image should unsettle a church that celebrates its bond with a distant state while forgetting believers in another community under that state's power. Palestinian Christians are members of the very church named in such a prayer. They may differ with me in liturgy, language, and political judgment. Those differences do not let me pray for a gathered church and then treat their testimony as an alien interruption.

Chapter ten's “after you are filled” is a small phrase with economic and theological consequence. The community gives thanks after eating. Its prayer acknowledges ordinary food as a gift for enjoyment and a spiritual nourishment through Jesus. Thanksgiving does not require feigned indifference to material need. Nor does a full stomach confer the right to forget the person who remains hungry. The first fruits in chapter thirteen and the requirement to aid travelers in chapter twelve join the meal to a circulation of food. A liturgy that speaks of bread while a church votes for its withholding has broken the relation the ancient manual keeps visible.

Chapter fourteen gives the assembly a day, an action, and a moral condition. Gather on the Lord's day, break bread, give thanks, confess transgressions; those at odds must seek reconciliation before they join the

common act. This is a powerful counterexample to the thought that early Christianity was nothing but unstructured fellowship. It had a rhythm and a boundary. The boundary is also a warning against a merely ceremonial purity. The broken relationship matters to worship. The quarrel cannot be covered by the correct words over the bread. A church that refuses to hear an injured member while celebrating an impeccably ordered service has the form and has disregarded the condition under which the form was given.

Reconciliation is demanding, and an abuser can misuse the demand. It cannot mean that a wounded person must meet privately with a dangerous offender, accept an apology without repair, or resume access to someone who may cause further harm. Peace requires truth and safety. The Didache's brief instruction cannot be made to carry a modern safeguarding policy; it can insist that common worship does not make interpersonal wrong disappear. The congregation has to find a just way of addressing the wrong. Confession that protects the powerful and burdens the injured is not the purity for which the chapter asks.

Chapter fifteen adds bishops and deacons. The community appoints them. They should be meek, truthful, tested, and free of love for money. They render service comparable to the prophets and teachers and deserve respect. The titles would acquire varied meanings as Christian institutions developed; I should not project a later system fully formed onto these few lines. The text does show an early local structure alongside traveling charismatics. Tolstoy's suspicion of a church that claims authority through office and then blesses violence remains forceful. His preference for a pure moral teaching, however, cannot explain away the fact that these Christians appointed people to maintain a shared life. The question is what sort of office serves the Way and how the community can call its holder to account.

It may help to picture the competing scales. The prophet arrives on the road and may leave the next day. The bishop remains among neighbors who know whether his patience survives a disagreement, and the deacon's service can be seen in ordinary distribution. The local congregation gains continuity, but continuity can harden into protection of its leaders. The Didache's tests of money and truthfulness are therefore conditions for office, not merely qualities admired after appointment. They imply the possibility that a leader fails and must be corrected. Chapter fifteen's reproof is to occur in peace, not anger. The community has no permission to turn its officers into untouchable representatives of God.

In my composite church life, one of the best people might have been the one who quietly arranged a ride for someone who could no longer drive. No microphone introduced that work as authority. Another person might command attention by narrating a spiritual encounter that no one could verify. The Didache has room for Spirit-filled speech; it also asks whether the meal is prepared, the hungry fed, the visitor received, the quarrel addressed, and the elder shown patience. If the quiet person's service holds the community together, the church should be capable of recognizing that wisdom. If the visitor's prophetic gift always ends with other people carrying the cost, the church should be able to say so without fear of insulting the Spirit.

The household church, then, is not a slogan for smaller buildings. It is an argument about who bears responsibility for a common life. A congregation may number twenty or two thousand and still ask whether anyone knows the names of the absent, whether a teacher's conduct can be examined, whether money moves toward need, and whether a meal can be shared after a wrong has been named. Scale makes the work different, but it does not change the moral questions. A house can be a stage for domination; a large institution can create trustworthy forms of care. The Didache measures each by what happens to the persons in its charge.

The order of the Didache's liturgical material has a temporal rhythm worth following. Before baptism, the candidate hears the Way and fasts. After baptism, prayer and fasting become recurring practices. Over cup

and bread the community gives thanks, and after being filled it gives thanks again. On the Lord's day it gathers, confesses, and reconciles. This is a form of moral memory carried by bodies and calendars. A Christian who cannot summon courage by private thought alone may be steadied by a practiced prayer. The text does not promise that repetition automatically produces virtue. It gives virtue a household of habits in which to grow.

There is a theological density to the prayer over the cup that Tolstoy's emphasis could underplay. The holy vine of David locates Jesus within Israel's history. The Son and Servant language, together with Father and Spirit in baptism, belongs to an early Christian way of naming God that cannot be reduced to a general law of kindness. Nor should a reader claim that the Didache already states a later creedal formulation in full. It provides particular words in a particular worshiping context. The safe conclusion is at once modest and important: the community that transmitted the ethical teaching also prayed through Jesus and invoked Father, Son, and Spirit. One cannot recruit its ethics as evidence that it was indifferent to every question of identity and worship.

The scattered bread is also an image of difference gathered without erasure. Grain from different hills becomes one loaf. A modern reader should be cautious about drawing a direct political program from the metaphor, yet its moral force is plain enough. If the church prays to be gathered from the ends of the earth, then a congregation elsewhere may disturb its local consensus. The people who inhabit the Holy Land are not only the figures an American reader has assigned to a map. Some are fellow Christians whose language and liturgy may differ from the American church. If we cannot recognize them as members of the gathered people, the prayer has been domesticated into a decorative phrase.

An ordinary household meal provides a place to learn the discipline of listening without claiming sacramental equivalence. Imagine the grandmother noticing that one chair stays empty because a relative has been offended. She can ask why; she can also mishandle the answer and pressure the injured relative to return before the wrong is repaired. Authority at the table is good only when joined to truth. The Didache's Lord's day instruction pairs bread with confession and reconciliation. A leader who merely gets the family back into the same room has arranged proximity. A leader who helps them address what happened may help restore communion. The distinction prevents “unity” from becoming a command for the harmed person to disappear into the group.

I find a corrective here to my irritation with church entertainment. A song sung by a whole congregation can be a genuine practice of memory, much as fixed prayer is. Beautifully arranged sound can open people to gratitude. The problem is not that worship has form, repetition, or feeling. It arises when the production of feeling becomes proof that the community has obeyed, and when a person who raises an unwelcome question appears to threaten the experience. The ancient manual contains prescribed words and repeated acts, yet it makes a quarrel and a teacher's love of money relevant to whether those acts are offered truthfully. That is a better critique of entertainment than a rejection of every liturgical pleasure.

The Didache's prayers have a striking absence as well as a presence. They do not recite, in the words transmitted here, the later institution narrative over bread and cup. That observation has generated debate about the nature of the meal and the stage of Eucharistic practice represented by this community. It does not mean that the group knew nothing of Jesus' death or that its thanksgiving was merely secular dining. Absence in a short instruction is a limited form of evidence. A church eager to prove that its own later liturgy existed in every detail at the beginning will overread the prayers. A critic eager to prove that Christians originally had no distinctive sacred meal will overread the same silence. The text names

Eucharist, prayer through Jesus, a baptized table, and a gathered church. We should allow those particulars to speak without forcing them to answer every later controversy.

The baptismal alternatives likewise refuse a pair of easy modern caricatures. Someone who values ritual might assume the correct form is so important that a lack of preferred water delays a convert indefinitely. Someone who distrusts ritual might say that the alternatives prove form was unimportant. The document says neither. It gives a preferred practice and then preserves the act under constraint. Its flexibility is purposeful because the person matters. A church in an emergency, a dry place, or a household with an ill convert can still obey. That practical compassion is a theological claim about what the practice is for. A ceremony should bring a person into a faithful community, not demonstrate the community's ability to insist on a scarce material.

The repetition of the Lord's Prayer also reminds me that discipleship is not merely a sequence of dramatic moral decisions. Most days contain mundane choices, small annoyances, routine expenses, and ordinary fear. A practice three times daily lets a person bring those details under a request for bread and forgiveness. It may expose a grudge that no sermon reaches. Tolstoy's demand for actual obedience can be helped by such a form even if his critique of a formalized church remains. Discipline is sometimes the method by which moral insight survives the next morning. The question is whether the repeated words keep a person awake to a neighbor or allow the person to claim a devotion that leaves the neighbor unseen.

My agreement with Tolstoy concerns the priority of obedience. He saw that a church can use ritual to escape the work of love, then call the escape fidelity. My disagreement concerns his treatment of the whole ancient text. Its prayers, water, appointed servants, and watchfulness are not removable packaging around a moral core. They are ways a community tried to remain faithful together over time. If I want to recover a church that thinks and acts, I need the whole argument of this manual: a taught way, a baptism into a people, bread received with thanks, money handled under scrutiny, offenses confessed, teachers examined, and hope kept alive. The table does not replace the Way. It gives people a place to practice it in one another's presence.

Chapter 12: The Didache’s Apocalypse

A book that begins with two ways ends by telling its people to watch. The lamps must remain lit. The community must gather often. False prophets and corrupters will multiply, affection will turn to hatred, a deceiver will claim power, and a time of trial will come. Then the signs of truth, the trumpet, resurrection, and the coming of the Lord appear. The final chapter is brief and, in the form preserved in the principal manuscript, seems to stop abruptly. Its ending has generated questions about a lost conclusion and about the traditions behind the passage. Even in its fragmentary state, it changes the claim that the Didache offers only an ethical handbook. The people who received its instruction expected a future act of God.

Tolstoy did not deny that the later chapters existed. In his framing of the document, he treated them as instructions for arranging the disciples' common life, while the first five chapters bore everything necessary to understand Christ's saving truth. That selection brought the moral commands into sharp focus. It also left the final expectation largely outside the account of what Christianity most essentially is. A reader who follows Tolstoy alone could walk away with a community whose future has been translated into the present practice of love. That practice is indispensable. It does not exhaust the text. The Didache's community awaits someone and something it cannot bring about by ethical improvement.

Scofield made nearly the opposite mistake. In his reference Bible, a reader could come to associate Christian expectancy with a timetable of distinct dispensations and events, especially the separation of the church's destiny from Israel's. Many later teachers multiplied the signs, identified actors in contemporary news, and made predictions more confident than the passages they used. Scofield himself belongs to a wider historical movement and should not be assigned every later extravagance. Nevertheless, the apparatus of a prophetic system can turn watching into the study of a chart. The Didache's single chapter offers a different emphasis. Watch “for your life's sake.” Gather. Seek what makes the soul fit. Beware the conversion of love into hate.

The warning about love is the most unnerving feature of its apocalypse. It does not begin by telling the church to watch a foreign capital, measure a border, or count treaties. It says that when lawlessness increases people will hate, persecute, and betray one another. Those who once appeared to be sheep may become wolves. The deceiver's signs can attract the eye, but the moral reversal inside the community may be the more immediate sign of danger. An end-times teaching that trains a congregation to feel contempt toward a people while claiming to make it watchful may be performing the very corruption it says it can detect.

Jesus' discourse in Matthew 24 stands close to this material: deception, persecution, betrayal, cooling love, endurance, and the coming of the Son of Man. Pauline and other Christian apocalyptic traditions also inform the world of the chapter. The Didache is not a detached prediction whose code can be solved independently of the Gospels and the rest of its own instruction. It carries forward the formation begun in chapter one. To read “false prophets” without chapter eleven's tests of money and conduct is to make deception a puzzle of correct labels instead of a danger involving real teachers. To read “love will turn to hate” without the earlier command to bless an enemy is to lose the evidence by which a reader might recognize the change.

A chart can be useful for arranging what a reader believes a text says, and a church history lesson can locate an ancient hope among later interpretations. The problem begins when the chart's precision exceeds the passages and its owner becomes unable to distinguish an inference from a sentence of Scripture. The Didache provides a sequence, but it does not assign dates, modern countries, diplomatic initiatives, or

candidates for the world-deceiver. Its “you do not know the hour” governs the whole paragraph. A person may believe that events are connected to the end without pretending to know a connection the text has not specified.

The chapter also complicates an easy claim that early Christians expected to be removed before suffering. Their community is told to endure a trial and remain faithful amid persecution. That does not, by itself, settle the contested interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4 or Revelation's various scenes. Different biblical texts and different Christian communities used apocalyptic imagery in ways that require careful comparison. But the Didache is a real early witness against making escape from tribulation the center of Christian hope. Its immediate instruction is endurance. Even if a believer holds a pretribulation rapture doctrine on other grounds, that believer should not make the final chapter say something it does not say.

The resurrection line is more difficult than a diagram suggests. It names a resurrection of the dead “not of all,” followed by an appeal to the Lord coming with his saints. Scholars debate its relation to resurrection traditions, what group is in view, and how the surviving text should be understood. The passage is not a complete systematic eschatology. I do not need to solve its every problem to see that the author expects a divine future beyond the community's own ethical development. It would be careless to claim that the phrase proves a familiar modern schedule of multiple resurrections. It would be equally careless to set it aside merely because it troubles a philosophical interpretation of eternal life.

I am struck by the sound of the trumpet at the end. In the services I knew, it could summon a thrill—the thought that we might be taken, vindicated, or spared. The emotion is understandable. A community that suffers can long for rescue; a bereaved family can hope for resurrection with a seriousness no intellectual puzzle captures. I resist only the distortion that turns hope of rescue into indifference toward those left to suffer now. If the trumpet we await makes us deaf to an ambulance outside a ruined hospital, our hope has been malformed. A Christian may expect Christ to come and still recognize that the sick require help today.

The Didache offers no doctrine of a modern state as a prophetic necessity. It emerged within the ancient Jewish and Christian world and bears the marks of that world, including the Two Ways tradition and prayers whose imagery is thoroughly scriptural. That origin should produce gratitude for Israel's Scriptures and vigilance against Christian contempt for Jews. It does not turn a present government's decisions into sacred events immune from judgment. The church cannot convert the difficult relations among ancient Israel, Jesus, the nations, and God's promise into a shortcut around ordinary questions of law and human dignity.

The apocalyptic language has its own danger in a time of atrocity. If a congregation describes destruction as inevitable and perhaps desirable because it precedes fulfillment, it may become less willing to prevent the destruction it can prevent. There is a difference between acknowledging that Scripture anticipates persecution and claiming that one should permit persecution to ripen. The Didache's warnings are addressed to the community so that it will keep its lamps lit and its love alive. Nothing in the chapter asks Christians to assist a catastrophe or to celebrate civilian death as confirmation that they were right. The word “watch” is a charge to moral attention, not a command to feed the fire.

Some readers will object that I am replacing their confident prophetic reading with an ethic I already prefer. The charge has enough force to require an answer. I have a preference for the preservation of human life, and I will not conceal it. The text also has an order and content that constrain me. I must reckon with resurrection and the coming Lord even where Tolstoy's program might make them secondary. I must reckon with judgment and false teaching even where a thin account of hospitality might prefer universal affirmation. And a dispensational reader must reckon with the fact that this early apocalyptic conclusion is

attached to commands to love enemies, share goods, test teachers, and reconcile before worship. Neither reader may take the paragraph he likes and discard the neighboring pages.

The temptation to know the secret is strong. My own scientific work has often involved looking for a hidden structure beneath a confusing surface. The skill is useful when an experiment can test the proposed structure. A prophecy system may generate a remarkable appearance of coherence because each event is made to illustrate the scheme that selected it. Failed predictions can be reclassified, and ordinary ambiguities become evidence of depth. That is a poor way to use a text that expressly reminds the believer of an unknown hour. A modest admission of ignorance can be a more faithful act than a brilliant arrangement whose confidence cannot be corrected.

Watchfulness in chapter sixteen is communal. “Come together often” appears alongside the warning. People need one another because love can cool gradually without anyone noticing the temperature change in himself. A congregation can ask whether its repeated prayers make enemies more human in its imagination. It can listen to members who see a dangerous turn before the leaders do. It can remember that a person who warns against cruelty may be one of the guardians of the lamps rather than a threat to the church's unity. The ancient community's endurance depended not on an individual decoder but on its common practices of correction and hope.

I return to the composite room where a prophecy teacher has filled the screen with a sequence of arrows. He may have labored honestly over every verse. The room may learn a great deal about a debated interpretation. My concern begins when a Palestinian child's absence from the diagram becomes a reason to disregard the child's presence in the world. A better lesson would leave the chart visible and invite a second question: what does the text ask us to do with the person who suffers in the events we are arranging? If no arrow points toward compassion, the lesson is incomplete.

A further caution concerns the desire to make every ancient text agree. The Didache's apocalypse gives a compressed sequence. Paul speaks in several letters to communities with different immediate questions. Revelation unfolds in visions whose symbols are not a transparent newspaper forecast. The Gospels preserve Jesus' warnings in narrative settings of their own. To lay the texts in parallel columns can expose connections, but it can also create a single precision instrument no ancient writer provided. The distinction between harmony and forced agreement matters. If one passage appears to place believers under trial and another seems to promise their gathering, a reader ought to identify the tension and explain the proposed resolution. Announcing that the two sentences obviously belong to different dispensations is one interpretation, not the removal of an interpretive problem.

I can see why a final chapter of warnings attracts a person who has watched institutions fail. A deceiver who speaks in the language of good and does evil seems plausible because history supplies many examples. Yet the text's vividness can tempt us to accuse an opponent of being the final deceiver without sufficient evidence. Such language magnifies a dispute until correction becomes nearly impossible. The ethical test is especially strict for the Christian who believes the last days may be near: urgency cannot excuse false witness. If a speaker turns a neighbor's mistake into cosmic proof of villainy, the speaker may be contributing to the increase of hatred the chapter names.

The short ancient ending therefore leaves me with a long contemporary discipline. Expect God to act beyond what institutions can manage. Keep public claims proportional to evidence. Do not train the church to love destruction merely because it can be made to fit a sequence. When a promise of resurrection is preached, ask whether the bereaved hear comfort and whether the living receive help. When warning of deception, give people ordinary ways to test the warning and the one who voices it. A lamp is useful

because it illuminates what is near enough to see, including one's own hand. It is a poor device for announcing a detailed map of a future no one has yet walked.

The order of the final chapter can be read as a training in epistemic humility. The community does not know the hour. It knows its duties while waiting. It will encounter false signs, severe trial, and claims of extraordinary power. It can preserve its lamps without being able to label every event. A reader who recognizes deception only after it is named on a chart may miss the more familiar deceiver who tells him that cruelty is courage and hatred is faithfulness. The manual's earlier tests of the preacher and of one's own money are part of apocalyptic discernment. It is not a second discipline that begins when a global crisis finally looks cinematic.

An apocalypse literally concerns disclosure, but the disclosure in this chapter is not a supply of secret geopolitical data for the clever. It brings a community to an end it does not control. Its hope can relieve the pressure to make every present defeat final and every current nation ultimate. The same hope can be abused to evade the ordinary time of human responsibility. If a pastor says that Christ will soon set all things right, the congregation may rightly take comfort. If he says it to discourage work for a ceasefire, food delivery, or legal accountability, he has made the future into a reason to neglect the living. The Didache's own imperative to gather and practice righteousness refuses that evasion.

The line about sheep becoming wolves is an unusually severe judgment of religious degeneration. It warns that a group can retain its name and change its character. The wolves are not necessarily obvious outsiders who infiltrate a pure church. The sentence makes a hearer consider that a formerly gentle person or congregation may learn predation. A movement can begin by protecting threatened people, then grow accustomed to excusing acts it once condemned because it sees those acts as necessary for its side. At the very moment the group insists most loudly on its identity, it may be losing the conduct by which the identity could be recognized. That is a more unsettling prophecy than the discovery of an enemy's symbol in a newspaper.

I also have to let the chapter trouble my confidence in Tolstoy. His moral challenge to church violence is indispensable to this book, but the Didache's future resurrection and coming Lord cannot be treated as immature symbols that a modern thinker has improved by converting them into ethics. I believe Christ's command demands conduct now; I also believe Christian hope reaches beyond what that conduct can accomplish. A child who has died does not return because the community has learned to be kind. A body ruined by violence calls forth a hope stronger than the moral improvement of survivors. The resurrection language keeps the claim of a future divine answer to death before us. Tolstoy may object to the way such hope has been used to pacify the oppressed. His objection is serious; erasing the hope would leave another wound.

No interpretation of this final chapter makes a church omniscient about history. Its last visible sentence places the Lord's coming before the world. The community has not been instructed to engineer that scene. It can make a meal, welcome a traveler, test a teacher, confess a fault, oppose cruelty, and keep a lamp. Those actions appear small beside an empire or a war. The ancient text locates faithfulness in them because they are within the community's responsibility. The fact that we cannot complete God's future is no reason to abandon the part of the present entrusted to us.

The figure of a world-deceiver is compelling, and modern interpreters have repeatedly tried to supply a name. The Didache does not invite a contest of headlines. It says the figure will claim a kind of divine power and work signs. The immediate danger is worshiping persuasive power because it seems to solve a crisis. A congregation may be tempted to follow a forceful leader who promises safety and certainty,

especially if it believes a final conflict has begun. The old manual's answer is to continue the Way already taught: refuse hatred, test the claimant's conduct, gather, endure. That answer may appear less thrilling than identifying a villain abroad. It also places the community under scrutiny before it passes judgment on someone else.

The passage's trial and resurrection raise questions about suffering that no theological chart can settle emotionally. If I tell someone whose child was killed that the suffering is one expected stage before a triumphant return, I may have described a belief without ministering to a person. The prophets of Israel and the lamenting psalms give Christians another form of faithful speech: grief, protest, pleading, and refusal to call the death acceptable. Apocalyptic hope can live with lament. Indeed, the expectation that God will judge and raise the dead can make the refusal to accept injustice more intense. A church ought to be able to lament an atrocity fully without worrying that grief signals disbelief in its promised future.

The line “the whole time of your faith will not profit you” if you fail at the last crisis can be frightening. It is addressed to a community capable of complacency, not an invitation to terrorize each anxious believer. I hear it as a warning that habits must be kept alive. A church's decades of right doctrine will not excuse a moment in which it chooses betrayal and hatred. Nor should a person imagine that one genuine act of love secures permanent moral immunity. The chapter asks for endurance because the road is long. That is a fitting end to a book whose first sentence gave the traveler two ways but no guarantee that naming the right one completed the journey.

Tolstoy would put the chart down and insist that we walk the road. I would follow him out of the room, carrying the Didache's last page with me. The ancient road has a horizon. Christ's coming is neither an excuse to postpone obedience nor a metaphor that we may dissolve into obedience. It is the hope before which obedience acquires urgency and humility. We are not the authors of the ending. We are responsible for the life we lead while we wait.

Part III: Scripture at the Fork

Chapter 13: One People or Two?

I can imagine the diagram drawn on a church whiteboard: Israel in one column, the church in another. A line runs through history beneath them. The teacher has the manner of a person solving a puzzle that has troubled others unnecessarily. Put each verse in the correct column, he says, and the contradictions disappear. The chart is attractive because it seems to respect every word. Nothing has to be discarded. The promises to Israel remain Israel's; the promises to the church remain the church's. The difficulty appears when the apostles speak of the two as reconciled in one body and when a system built to preserve a distinction begins to preserve a wall.

That imagined lesson is a composite, as are the congregational scenes throughout this book. Its argument is real. A strong dispensationalist does not say that Jews and Gentiles have different gods or that a Jew can be saved without Christ. The claim is subtler: God's covenant commitments to the descendants of Jacob retain a national future even as Jews and Gentiles share salvation in Christ. The church does not exhaust Israel's identity or inherit every national promise. If I am going to disagree, I must disagree with that claim, not with a crude substitute.

There is another ancient diagram, though it is not drawn with columns for nations. The Didache begins with two ways, one of life and one of death. Its distinction concerns what people do: love God and neighbor, bless the one who curses, give to the person in need, refuse violence and deceit. The text comes from an early Christian world close enough to Judaism that its moral teaching cannot be understood as a Christian invention made after Judaism had been abandoned. It belongs to a Jewish moral inheritance carried into a community confessing Jesus. The alternative paths are not assigned by blood. They are open before the hearer. This is the first reason I place that little book beside Scofield's large one. They organize attention differently. One asks where a person stands in a sacred schedule. The other asks which way the person is walking.

Neither arrangement by itself is a complete theology. The Didache does not settle all of Paul's questions about Israel; Scofield's distinctions do not automatically prevent good works. The difference becomes consequential when a reader assumes that a category has already answered a moral question. The existence of a covenant promise cannot tell me, without further argument, whether a civilian may be starved or a house demolished. The Way of Life, by contrast, will not permit me to move past the hungry person while I decide where she belongs on a chart. Tolstoy saw the power of that order of attention. He was right to insist that Christianity becomes visible in obedience, even though he later tried to thin out much of the theological story that made such obedience intelligible to early Christians.

Romans 9–11 is where such a disagreement should begin. Paul's grief is not an ornament at the opening of a debate. He speaks of his own kin and their privileges: adoption, covenants, worship, promises, patriarchs, and the Messiah according to human descent. He is not willing to make their history vanish into a general story about religion. If I read the passage in order to prove that Jews have been discarded, I have misread the emotional force of its first sentences. If I read it as a grant of divine approval to a twenty-first-century state, I have arrived at an institution and an argument Paul does not name.

His grief gives the discussion a test of tone. There have been Christian arguments about Israel delivered as though the writer were pleased to announce the defeat of another people. Paul speaks as one of them and refuses that pleasure. He neither retracts his witness to Christ nor treats disagreement with his kin as a

reason to wish them ill. Any church treatment of these chapters that comes away eager to declare Jewish abandonment ought to hear the opening again before it goes further.

Paul must explain an apparent failure. If many Israelites do not receive the Messiah whom he proclaims, has God's word failed? He answers by distinguishing descent from the promise's effective purpose. Israel's history has always involved election within a people, a remnant within a larger population. Isaac and Jacob matter to the shape of that argument. The distinction does not say that physical descent is imaginary. Paul identifies himself by descent, and he will return to the natural branches. It says that ancestry cannot be converted into an automatic guarantee of covenant fidelity.

The language of remnant can be abused. Christians have sometimes spoken as though a small group of Jewish followers of Jesus gave Gentile Christians permission to consign all other Jews to divine rejection. That is precisely the boasting Paul forbids. A remnant is not an excuse to stop praying for, listening to, or protecting the wider people. Nor is it a warrant to claim that their suffering was deserved. Paul's own anguish defeats that use of his argument before one reaches chapter 11.

In chapter 10 he wishes for Israel's salvation and sets forth the nearness of the word of faith. The confession of Jesus is offered without a separate ladder for one ancestry and another. The same Lord is generous to all who call upon him. A Christian can state that conviction while also recognizing that Jewish people do not owe Christians agreement with it. Theological witness never licenses contempt, coercion, or the theft of another people's security. These are different kinds of claim, and confusion among them has done real harm.

The olive tree in chapter 11 is the image I want a church teacher to leave on the whiteboard after the columns have been erased. Some natural branches have been broken off; wild branches have been grafted in. The wild branches do not become the root. They share nourishment they did not originate. Natural branches can be grafted in again. Paul addresses the Gentile as someone unusually tempted to think that his inclusion entitles him to superiority. The warning is not a courtesy tucked into a passage that otherwise establishes Gentile succession. It is one of the main things the image was built to say.

The metaphor also resists the chart's neatness. It is one tree with differentiated branches. The branches are not all interchangeable; Paul distinguishes natural from wild and envisions a particular mercy toward his kin. Yet neither class grows from a separate root. I understand the root in relation to God's covenant faithfulness to the patriarchs, and the life of that tree as a gift fulfilled in Christ. Christians disagree about exactly how each element of the metaphor maps onto the church. But a reading that uses the image to maintain two unrelated covenant communities has to explain why Paul drew one tree.

I have to examine my own preferred phrase, "one people," under the pressure of that warning. It can mean one reconciled body in Christ, with a Jewish Messiah and a Gentile membership indebted to Israel's covenants. It can also become the declaration of a Gentile church pleased to have taken a name and unwilling to acknowledge those who bore it first. The words are the same; the stance is entirely different. Paul addresses his warning to the included Gentile precisely because inclusion can turn into swagger. He refuses to let a newcomer describe a family's history as an obsolete preliminary to his own arrival. The root supports him; he does not support the root.

In Christian history, Jewish people have not experienced this danger only as a question of terminology. Churches proclaimed the fulfillment of Israel's Scriptures while accusing living Jews of rejection, fostering contempt and at times persecution. That record should make me more exact when I say the church participates in Israel's promises through Christ. It should also make me more exact about the word "church." The New Testament church is not simply the later, powerful Gentile institution into which Jewish

believers must disappear. Its first witnesses were Jews. Its Gentile members did not originate the covenantal language they came to speak. If our theology of one body cannot remember those facts, it will announce unity in the manner of annexation.

There is a reason the illustration is botanical rather than architectural. A wall can be moved or reconstructed; branches live by a relation they cannot manufacture. The Gentile branch is not instructed to negotiate better standing with the natural branch. It is instructed to remember dependence and to fear the arrogance that can accompany its new place. Paul can say at once that some branches have been broken off for unbelief and that the people represented by those branches remain beloved in relation to their ancestors. The paradox is part of the argument. A church that keeps only the broken branch has made a theology of rejection. A church that keeps only the beloved ancestry can forget Paul's call to faith and mercy. Neither half is his whole account.

The hardest words may be Paul's expectation that "all Israel" will be saved. Interpretations range from a future turning of the Jewish people on a wide scale, to the full company of Jewish believers through history, to the whole redeemed people of God, Jewish and Gentile. Each has difficult questions to answer. Paul has just spoken of a partial hardening of Israel while Gentiles enter, and of natural branches being grafted in again. That context gives considerable weight to an expectation of future mercy toward Jewish people as Jewish people. I do not need to close that future in order to reject a scheme that translates it into permanent approval for every decision of a modern state.

Indeed, a believer can expect a distinctive future mercy for Jewish people and still speak of one redeemed community in Christ. This is not a verbal trick. The distinction is between the identity of the people whose restoration Paul hopes for and the means by which they share God's mercy. Jewish particularity need not disappear in a universal salvation. Gentile inclusion need not be postponed until a separate program has ended. The earliest church had to learn to eat together, worship together, and debate how differences in observance could remain without turning into a caste system. Its practical struggle would make little sense if union were merely a metaphor for separate destinies.

The dispute at Antioch in Galatians is a useful test. Peter had eaten with Gentile believers, then withdrew under social pressure. Paul understood the withdrawal as a betrayal of the gospel's truth. The issue was more than a menu. A shared table said publicly that these Gentiles had been received without first becoming Jews. The Jerusalem council likewise decided that Gentiles need not take on circumcision and the whole Mosaic law to belong. These decisions did not forbid Jewish believers from living as Jews; the New Testament continues to show Jewish observance. The apostles were negotiating a unity whose practical shape mattered. They did not pretend that differences of history and practice were unreal. They refused to let those differences bar fellowship in Christ.

Galatians 3 connects the social contest at the table to Abraham. Paul says that those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed and heirs of the promise. His point does not require Gentiles to pretend that they descend from Jacob; it denies that descent is the condition for their share in Christ. A covenantal continuity joins them to a story they did not begin. The question then becomes whether "heirs" refers only to a detachable spiritual portion while a separate national timetable controls everything material. Paul does not spell out a modern territorial conclusion. But neither does he describe the Gentiles' share as a consolation prize after the principal inheritance has been reserved elsewhere. The interpreter who distributes parts of the promise between two enduring peoples owes an account of how that division arises from the apostle's argument.

The Didache provides a deliberately modest test here. It does not contain a Pauline essay on Israel. It teaches Gentile and Jewish-background Christians, to the extent we can identify its mixed setting, how to pray, fast, eat, choose ministers, and await the Lord. It retains visible marks of Jewish ethical and liturgical inheritance even as it distinguishes its practices. In its account of the shared bread, scattered grain is gathered into one loaf as a figure for the church. That figure does not settle whether there is a distinct future for Israel, but it shows what a community of reconciliation expected to do together now. One body cannot be merely a promise about a future age if it will not share the present table.

I am wary, therefore, of both an easy "one" and an easy "two." An easy "one" can demand assimilation and call its demand reconciliation. An easy "two" can preserve difference by making separation permanent and then treat the separation as divinely administered. A more demanding unity makes room for Jewish identity, for Gentile belonging without adoption of Jewish ancestry, and for mutual accountability. It leaves a Christian with no category for saying that a wrong committed by one group is right because its members occupy a sacred column. It also leaves no category for calling an assault on Jewish civilians a necessary correction to a theological error.

Craig Blaising makes a serious challenge to my view. He argues that Christian theology has often removed Israel from the center of its own Scripture. In some forms, the church's claim to fulfill Israel became a judgment that Jewish people had been abandoned. In other forms, Israel's concrete history was reduced to a set of symbols for a supposedly superior, abstract spirituality. His criticism deserves more than a defensive footnote. A church that forgets Jesus was a Jew of David's line, that the apostles were Jews, and that Gentile Christians are guests at a table they did not build has distorted its confession.

Blaising also insists that the question of a future for ethnic and national Israel is not identical to the prospects of the present state. That distinction is crucial. Even a scholar who affirms national promises can decline to treat current state policy as the direct execution of prophecy. Christians who want to argue for that further identification owe the reader further reasons. They cannot borrow the seriousness of Paul's concern for his kin and place it without examination behind any contemporary boundary, settlement, siege, or weapons decision.

Where I part company with Blaising is at the inference that faithful divine promise requires a separate national destiny of the kind a dispensational chart assigns. In Romans, the purpose of God's fidelity includes mercy that overcomes disobedience, and the Gentile's inclusion is meant to provoke hope rather than triumph. Paul is making an argument about salvation and the reliability of God. He is not drafting a constitution for a later nation-state. The prophetic texts behind his argument may leave room for future political and earthly dimensions; they cannot be emptied of history by a wave of the hand. But neither can they be made a license to suspend the moral demands that run through that same prophetic tradition.

Someone may object that I have softened the old church claim only in order to arrive at it by another route. If the church is one body, if inheritance is in Christ, and if political Israel is not directly identified with Paul's Israel, what is left of the promise to the Jewish people? My answer cannot be a polite slogan. Paul's question is whether God remains faithful to the people from whom the Messiah came, even while many do not accept him. Paul's answer is yes. I leave the scope and timing of the future mercy open where the text leaves readers arguing. What I will not do is replace Paul's living question with the assertion that an existing government's military decisions are the index of God's faithfulness. That substitution gives more power to a state than Paul gives it.

There is a danger in the phrase "the church is Israel," even when used to express continuity. It can sound as if a predominantly Gentile institution has occupied the name and left Jews outside their own story. Better to

state the apostolic claim with its verbs intact: Gentiles who were far off are brought near; branches from elsewhere are grafted into a living tree; people who belong to Christ share Abraham's promise. The movement is incorporation, not a victory march over an abandoned people. A Christian theology that cannot speak tenderly and precisely here should hesitate before speaking with confidence about the final fate of anyone else.

I also know a possible objection from Jewish readers. An argument organized around whether Jews enter a Christian account of covenant can itself make Jewish life subordinate to Christian categories. That is a fair warning about the limits of this chapter. I am interpreting Christian Scripture for Christians whose political conduct has consequences for others. Jewish religious identity and Jewish civic rights do not depend upon accepting my interpretation of Paul. When I ask a church to abandon arrogant readings, I am not asking Jews to become props in the corrected version.

The same applies to Palestinians. A Palestinian Christian is not an inconvenient exception to a story about Jews and Gentiles. He or she is among the people who claim Christ and read Paul; a Palestinian Muslim or a person of no faith retains a life and rights that require no Christian theological endorsement. The modern political conflict includes histories and legal claims that this passage cannot settle. Theology enters the conflict when believers claim it has already settled those matters, and then treat other evidence as impiety.

The whiteboard columns promise a kind of security. If God has assigned everything in advance, my church may feel free from the burden of judging the present. We can pray for Jewish people and for Palestinians, then explain why only one side's political demands are backed by covenant. We can recognize suffering in a photograph and still refuse to reconsider a policy that contributes to it. The procedure feels faithful because the categories were learned in Bible study. That is why the categories need Bible study again.

Paul ends the long argument not with a territorial map but with astonishment at the depth of divine wisdom. He has warned one set of readers against boasting, denied that God has rejected his people, insisted that mercy is the goal, and described gifts that God does not revoke. A preacher could spend years with those claims without turning a single Jewish or Palestinian life into an instrument of a political program. The restraint would not weaken the passage. It would allow Paul's actual argument to interrupt ours.

I think of the believer who has inherited the two columns and worries that erasing them means betraying Israel. The worry should be heard. Christians have betrayed Jewish people before, with dreadful consequences. Yet the alternative is not a choice between erasing Jews and exempting a state from criticism. We can affirm Jewish life, oppose antisemitism without reservation, attend to the continuing particularity of Paul's kin, and also refuse the partition of moral concern that a rigid chart can induce. One tree has room for a more difficult fidelity than two sealed columns allow.

Chapter 14: Who Inherits the Promise?

When a preacher asks, “Whose land is it?” the question often arrives already narrowed. It assumes that a biblical promise can be carried intact across millennia and set on the table of a modern border dispute as a complete title. The question deserves serious reading, because the land in Genesis is real land, not a metaphor introduced by embarrassed modern Christians. It also deserves more than a verse lifted from its story. Ownership, dwelling, covenant, justice, exile, return, neighbor, and stranger all belong to the scriptural account. So do the people living there now.

God calls Abram from his country toward a land he will be shown. The promise grows through Genesis: descendants, blessing, a place, and a vocation through which the nations will be blessed. At one point boundaries are described; at another the ancestors live as sojourners without possessing the land in the way a later reader might assume. The story cannot be collapsed into an abstract feeling of belonging. But neither is it a deed written for the cabinet of a state thousands of years after the patriarchs. Before a reader says that one verse settles all competing claims, the reader must answer who the relevant heirs are, how the promise is fulfilled, what obligations accompany dwelling, and what relation a contemporary government bears to an ancient covenant people.

I separate three meanings of Israel whenever this discussion moves toward policy. Israel in the Bible can name Jacob, the descendants of Jacob, a kingdom, a covenant people, or the people about whom Paul grieves. Jews today are a people with living religious and cultural traditions, diverse political convictions, and a history that cannot be reduced to the beliefs of Christians about them. The State of Israel is a modern state founded in 1948, with citizens, institutions, borders disputed in some areas, armed forces, and obligations under international law. Continuities among those meanings are historically and theologically significant; identity among them cannot simply be presumed. If a speaker says “support Israel,” I need to know whether the object is Jewish people’s safety, a theological hope, a state’s existence, a government’s policy, or a particular military operation. Love for a people cannot be measured by agreement with every act of a cabinet.

Nor does a refusal to equate a state with ancient Israel mean that Jewish attachment to the land is invented. History, worship, memory, language, family, trauma, and longing are real. Christian reading of Genesis is incapable of adjudicating every historical title and civic claim. My point is narrower: the ancient promise cannot be converted by Christians into an exemption from judging present conduct. A reader who hears this as a denial of Jewish existence should hear the distinction again. A reader who has denied Palestinian rootedness should ask why a Jewish story of home seems comprehensible while a Palestinian one is treated as a problem to solve away.

The Hebrew Scriptures do not treat the land as a possession over which its human inhabitants have unlimited sovereignty. Leviticus tells Israel that the land belongs to God and that its residents are, in a profound sense, tenants. That is a startling limit on the rhetoric of ownership. Sabbaths for the land, provisions for the poor, and restraints on permanent alienation frame possession as stewardship. The law also protects the foreigner; its precise rules arise in an ancient society rather than in a modern citizenship code, but their moral direction is difficult to reconcile with indifference toward displaced neighbors.

Deuteronomy complicates any simple claim that the covenant is either wholly conditional or wholly unconditional. It warns of dispossession for disobedience and imagines return after judgment. The promise and the demand remain in conversation. A nation can suffer the consequence of injustice without God’s purpose being exhausted. A hope for restoration can survive without declaring each claimant righteous.

This distinction is not an ingenious compromise made for modern politics. It belongs to the grammar of the biblical story. When a Christian says, “The promise is unconditional,” I want to ask what that person means about the conduct of those who dwell in the land. When someone says, “The people were expelled,” I want to ask whether that sentence is being used to deny a continuing Jewish attachment. The text requires greater patience than either slogan permits.

The prophets make the issue sharper. Ezekiel reports people in a ruined land claiming entitlement on the basis of Abraham, only to confront them with their violence and wrongdoing. The prophet does not deny that Abraham matters. He refuses the use of Abraham as a shield against judgment. One can argue about how the ancient oracle bears on a modern conflict without missing its immediate point: a sacred ancestral claim cannot make the conduct of a claimant irrelevant. The biblical writers did not think covenant language replaced the question of justice.

The question of whose conduct matters must not be applied selectively. Biblical judgment is not a tool reserved for the state one already opposes. Violence directed at Jewish civilians has to be condemned by the same moral reasoning. An attack on Palestinians cannot become tolerable because a promise is invoked, and an attack on Jews cannot become tolerable because a critic believes that promise has been misread. Prophetic justice is not a partisan device. Its claim on the reader becomes most visible when the reader would prefer an exemption for a favored cause.

There is another detail in Ezekiel’s vision of restoration that ought to disturb an exclusive map. In the allotment of the land, resident foreigners who have raised families there are to receive inheritance among the tribes. One should not pretend that this visionary arrangement can simply be implemented by a contemporary government. Yet it exposes how strange it is to invoke Ezekiel for the purity of an exclusive entitlement while leaving out his insistence that the stranger can belong. The land in the prophetic imagination is a place where God’s justice is made visible, not an excuse for making a neighboring population invisible.

One might answer that the foreigner in Ezekiel is incorporated into Israel rather than set beside Israel as a separate national people. That is a fair observation about the text. It also reinforces the point that the promise’s imagined social shape includes people the first inheritors could have excluded. The prophet’s imagination is not a blueprint for the institutions of a secular or religious state. It is an internal challenge to readers who think divine gift needs no social ethics. If God owns the land, no human claimant is its absolute proprietor. If a stranger may inherit, a covenant vocabulary that says the stranger is permanently out of place has failed to read its own prophets.

The Didache’s Way of Life is even less a land policy. It has no boundary commission and no account of sovereignty. But it asks the person with resources not to turn away from the one in need, and it forbids the possessive spirit that treats gifts as private absolutes. Its small domestic demands test the large political assertion. A Christian who announces a land promise while refusing to share bread, shelter, or safety with a threatened neighbor has made an ancient covenant more congenial than an ancient command. Tolstoy is a hard interlocutor here because he would press the command all the way into the apparatus of state power. I do not accept every step of his political conclusion. I do accept his refusal to let the interpreter escape a concrete injured person by retreating into a theory of ownership.

Isaiah offers another expansive picture, imagining a road connecting Egypt, Assyria, and Israel under divine blessing. Ancient empires are named in an oracle that refuses to imagine Israel’s good as the permanent humiliation of surrounding peoples. The image does not erase Israel. It locates Israel in a future with neighbors. When modern Christians appeal to prophecy to dismiss a neighbor as an obstacle, they

have chosen one part of the prophetic imagination and discarded another. The promise's geography is inseparable from the character of the peace envisioned there.

This reading does not require a Christian to deny Jewish historical attachment to the land. That attachment is ancient and continuous in religious memory and lived history. Jews have been persecuted and expelled from many other lands; the desire for safety must be taken seriously. Palestinian attachment also exists in generations of homes, farms, graves, worship, and speech. Neither people can be converted into an abstract theological obstruction. A Christian claim about Abraham should never be used to cancel the facts of someone else's life.

The New Testament revisits the promise in ways a reference system must not preclassify away. Paul's argument in Galatians is directed against making Gentile believers undergo circumcision and adopt the Mosaic law as the condition of belonging. He returns to Abraham before Sinai and speaks of the blessing promised to the nations. He places Christ at the center of the promise to Abraham's seed, then says that those who belong to Christ are Abraham's heirs. This is not an incidental spiritual addendum in an otherwise unchanged account of inheritance. It is part of Paul's answer to who belongs in the family and on what terms.

One temptation in Christian reading is to say that the New Testament simply replaces everything material in the older writings with a spiritual version. That can make the prophets' hunger for a just city, safe vineyards, and peace among neighbors seem childish. Another temptation is to say that the apostles may add a blessing for Gentiles but may not alter how earlier promises are understood at all. That makes their interpretation decorative. The harder task is to follow their actual movement: a particular people, a particular land, a particular Messiah, the nations welcomed, and a promised future in which the earth itself is renewed. A widening of scope is neither an erasure of the starting point nor a refusal to learn from what came later.

Christ is the center of this Christian reading, but that sentence has to do work. Jesus is not a device for making the material world disappear. He lived as a Jew in a particular land under imperial rule. He taught love of neighbor, warned of judgment, wept over Jerusalem, and called peacemakers blessed. His resurrection makes Christians hope for transformed embodied life. To read a land promise through him, then, is to ask what he reveals about the use of power, the dignity of the vulnerable, and the scope of God's kingdom. A promise interpreted through Christ cannot be severed from Christ's teaching simply because a prophecy chart has assigned that teaching to another dispensation.

The singular "seed" argument in Galatians has provoked argument among readers who know that collective nouns can work differently in Hebrew and Greek. Paul is not offering a modern grammar exercise as an independent proof of land law. He is reading the Abraham story in light of the Messiah and the new membership created through him. His point is theological and ecclesial. Because the heir is Christ, the circle of heirs cannot be restricted by the genealogical boundary his opponents wished to enforce. Men and women, enslaved and free, Jewish and Gentile believers share the promise in him.

A dispensational reader may reply that Paul speaks here of spiritual blessing, especially the gift of the Spirit, without cancelling a distinct territorial promise to the descendants of Jacob. That is a real argument, not an evasion. Galatians does not recite the metes and bounds of Genesis or say in a single line that no future territorial promise remains. Yet the proposed division between a spiritual inheritance for the church and an earthly one for Israel does more work than Paul explicitly assigns it. The burden falls on the system to show why the heirs Paul names may receive Abraham's promise only after a reader has sorted the material part into a separate column.

Romans broadens the horizon in another way when Paul describes Abraham as heir of the world. That language may express the worldwide scope of the covenant's blessing rather than cancel the particular land of Genesis. It nevertheless prevents a Christian from treating the final reach of the promise as a small bounded parcel. Hebrews portrays Abraham living in the promised land as a stranger who looked toward a city founded by God. Its account of the faithful does not suggest that place ceased to matter; it teaches that earthly possession did not exhaust what the promise meant. The final Christian hope includes a renewed creation, not an escape from all material reality, and that hope expands rather than trivializes the demand for justice now.

Ephesians adds a social picture to Paul's account of inheritance. Gentiles had been strangers to Israel's covenants. In Christ, those once far away are brought near. The writer speaks of a broken barrier, an end to hostility, and a new humanity made from the two. He does not say that Jewish history was a mistake now erased. The reconciliation takes place through Israel's Messiah, and the Gentile's former exclusion remains part of the story. The text does say that the construction of a permanent religious wall between those now joined in Christ contradicts the work being described.

Scofield's 1917 note at Ephesians 3:6 is a useful check on any careless account of his position. He calls the church a new body made of Jews and Gentiles in which their earthly distinction disappears. He does not propose two ranks of salvation inside the church. His next move is the decisive one: he treats this body as a mystery disclosed particularly through Paul, with its own doctrine, position, walk, and destiny. The distinction between Israel and church is thus placed around the new body, not drawn through its membership. A defender can say that the union Paul describes is real while ancient national promises await another fulfillment. I ask whether Paul's language about the formerly distant now sharing the promise permits that separation to govern the reading of all the older texts. The note states a serious answer; the passage still has to judge it.

The footnote can make a difficult question look solved by a division of topics: spiritual blessings in this age, national and territorial blessings in another. Yet the categories are themselves part of the argument, not neutral drawers supplied by the verse. Abraham's promised land is material, but Paul's "heir of the world" is not therefore immaterial. The promised Spirit is spiritual, but its recipients form actual households, eat actual meals, and face actual hostility. The letter to the Ephesians announces peace as a reality of bodies in a shared society. If a system relegates that reconciliation to one compartment while a program for separation occupies another, a reader should ask which compartment is setting the terms for the others.

The wall language is dangerous if handled lazily. A Christian can use it to tell Jews that their distinctive traditions ought to disappear. Another can claim that spiritual peace has rendered concrete injustice unimportant. Both readings blunt the text. The passage begins with actual human hostility and arrives at shared household membership. It makes peace more demanding than a sentiment. A church cannot celebrate the demolition of hostility on Sunday and then make hostility into a sacred necessity in its account of the Holy Land.

Palestinian Christians often hear such arguments from within the geography at issue. They belong to the body that Gentile Christians elsewhere claim as their own. Yet some American Christians can speak of the church as an international family while treating Palestinian members as marginal to the story of the land. This is a theological failure before it is a matter of public relations. If a believer announces that Abraham's blessing reaches the nations through Christ, the believer cannot give the people who bear witness to Christ in Palestine the status of expendable bystanders.

That observation should not set Palestinian Christians against Jews as rival proofs in a Christian argument. Their citizenship, safety, and ordinary human standing do not derive from a church's ability to recognize them. I mention them because a theology that speaks confidently of the body of Christ while failing to notice part of that body has revealed something about its attention. Palestinian Muslims deserve the same civil protection. The Christian reason to attend to them is not that they can be turned into honorary church members. It is that they are neighbors and human beings.

Some defenders of Christian Zionism appeal to the unconditional character of God's covenant with Abraham. They fear that adding a test of justice makes God's faithfulness depend on human achievement and repeats the old claim that Jews lost their place because they failed. That concern must be faced. The promise of God's fidelity and the conditions of faithful dwelling are related without being identical. Ancient Israel's prophets could announce exile for injustice and continue to hope for restoration. Their warnings were not statements that God had forgotten Abraham. A Christian who says that no state is above moral judgment is not thereby saying that Jews have no future or no right to security.

Modern political rights require arguments of their own. A state's obligations under humanitarian law do not rise or fall on the outcome of a dispute about Galatians. Jewish civilians do not have to prove the correct eschatology to be protected from attack. Palestinian civilians do not have to prove they are Abraham's theological heirs to be protected from expulsion, hunger, or bombardment. If a church forgets those elementary distinctions, it can turn Scripture into a machine for withholding the moral standards it normally applies everywhere else.

Consider the common shortcut from land promise to diplomatic obligation. A biblical narrative identifies an inheritance. A speaker identifies the current state with the heir. The speaker concludes that any American pressure upon that state is opposition to God. Each movement needs scrutiny. The first concerns the meaning of an ancient text; the second concerns historical identity, continuity, and the treatment of other inhabitants; the third concerns policy under contemporary law and foreseeable human effects. Even a reader who accepts the first two may reject the third. A government can possess legitimate claims, face genuine threats, and still commit a wrong for which an ally ought to hold it accountable. That ordinary moral possibility is lost when three distinct arguments are delivered as one verse.

What, then, does the promise ask of Christians? It asks them to read Abraham's blessing as a responsibility that reaches outward. It asks them to listen to Paul's account of heirs in Christ without erasing Jewish history. It asks them to remember that the land in the prophets remains God's and that justice has a claim upon its inhabitants. It asks them to resist the ease with which a line in Genesis can become an argument that no line drawn around a contemporary population may be questioned.

Back in the imagined sermon, I would leave the preacher's question on the board but add another beneath it. Whose land is it? Who is made safe there, and who is made homeless? The first question cannot be answered faithfully without considering the second. The God who promises is also the God who hears the cry of people injured by the conduct of those who claim his promise. A theology that has no place for that cry has not solved the inheritance question. It has stopped reading before the story reaches its demand.

Chapter 15: The Rapture and the Prophecy Clock

The lesson can be made exciting with almost nothing: a clock, a blank chair, and the suggestion that the next sound the congregation hears might be the last before believers disappear. In an imagined service assembled from patterns I encountered in the churches I knew, a speaker lowers his voice. We must be ready. A child imagines an empty car rolling across an intersection. An adult wonders whether a neighbor would be left behind. For a moment everyone feels the future close enough to touch. The service has produced urgency, but urgency is not the same as understanding.

There is a biblical promise beneath the performance. Paul writes to grieving Christians in Thessalonica who fear that believers who have died may miss the Lord’s coming. He assures them that the dead in Christ will rise and that the living will be caught up with them to meet the Lord. This is a word of consolation addressed to people mourning the dead. The scene is anything but quiet: Paul describes a command, an archangel’s voice, and a trumpet. The text does not ask its readers to enjoy imagining the fate of those left in a driverless car. It tells them to encourage one another with the hope that death will not separate the faithful from Christ.

The Didache’s final chapter belongs in this conversation. After fifteen chapters about ways of life, baptism, meals, traveling teachers, local officers, and community discipline, it calls the community to keep watch. False prophets, corruption, signs, a final deceiver, the coming of the Lord, and resurrection enter its closing horizon. It does not supply a pretribulation interval or divide two sets of the redeemed into timetables. It also does not allow Tolstoy to make every expectation of a future divine act disappear into an inward awakening. A community organized around giving to the poor and testing its teachers expected an end beyond its own moral progress. Its watchfulness was attached to practices it had already been taught to perform.

I see two temptations when I put the three texts together. The Scofield reader can make the future so diagrammatic that today’s neighbor becomes one more sign. The Tolstoy reader can make the present obligation so complete that the resurrection and coming Lord recede into symbols of ethical life. The Didache refuses that bargain. A person must choose the Way of Life now, and the community waits for a future it cannot administer. Its apocalypse does not instruct a congregation to abandon mercy for prediction. Its ethic does not pretend that history’s end can be achieved by improving human conduct alone.

The word “rapture” names that catching up. Arguments about whether the English word occurs in a particular translation miss the larger issue. Christians across different schools of thought can affirm that Christ will come, the dead will rise, and believers will be gathered. Their dispute concerns when that gathering takes place in relation to tribulation, judgment, and the visible appearing of Christ. The question is not whether Paul wrote a sentence about being caught up. It is how that sentence belongs with the rest of the New Testament’s account of the end.

Scofield’s 1917 annotation at 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is revealing because it is more careful than a popular caricature of his system. He says the first resurrection includes saved people of every dispensation, while calling the catching up a distinctive hope of the church. The note does not, by itself, specify every interval in a pretribulation chart. In the introduction to Revelation, however, he arranges the book’s successive scenes around the churches, the tribulation, and the kingdom. A reader following the references encounters a larger sequence than the one sentence under Paul. Here again the system speaks through the selection and arrangement of passages as well as through explicit propositions in a footnote. A critic who claims

Scofield's note says only church saints rise has misread it; a defender who claims Paul's single paragraph supplies the completed chart has also gone beyond the page.

One can inspect another of Scofield's own notes to see how the timeline acquires a memorable visual form. His treatment of Enoch and Noah as figures reads Enoch's being taken before the flood as a type of saints caught up before tribulation, while Noah preserved through judgment figures a Jewish remnant remaining on earth. Typology is a Christian practice, and the New Testament itself sometimes reads older events as patterns. But Genesis does not identify Enoch with the church and Noah with Israel; the typological assignments are an interpretive act by the annotator. Once printed beside the older story, they can feel less like an inference and more like what the story was about all along. This is an example of the second voice on the page acquiring authority without changing a word of the first.

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul describes the transformation of living believers and the resurrection of the dead in the context of victory over death. A trumpet sounds there too. John 14 speaks of Jesus coming again to take his disciples to be with him. Matthew 24 portrays the Son of Man appearing openly after distress and gathering his elect with a trumpet. In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul discusses the coming of the Lord and the gathering of believers while warning against a claim that the day has already arrived. These passages provide real material for comparison. None, read by itself, supplies an entire sequence with a secret removal of the church, a seven-year interval, a later public return, and a timetable for a nation-state.

A pretribulation interpreter knows this. At its most careful, the position is an inference made from several texts. It distinguishes a coming of Christ for the church from a later coming with the church; it connects Daniel's final week, Jesus' discourse, Paul's letters, and Revelation in a single sequence. The church is removed before the period of unparalleled distress, and the Lord returns in glory afterward. Dallas Theological Seminary's doctrinal statement lays out this distinction plainly: the Lord receives believers in the air, Israel's seventieth week follows, and the tribulation ends with his return to earth and the restoration of Israel. This is an honest statement of a system. It is not a verse that happens to print the entire system in one place.

The strongest appeal of the position is pastoral. The church is called to expect Christ, not to wait for a known chain of disasters before hope becomes reasonable. God has not destined believers for wrath. The New Testament can speak of a sudden arrival, a thief's unexpected visit, and the protection of the faithful. Daniel's language about a final period seems to some readers to leave unfinished business for Israel. A distinction between Israel and the church then makes the removal of the church before that period intelligible. This is a connected argument. It deserves a connected reply.

One reply begins with Paul's own consolation. He does not tell the Thessalonians that their assurance depends on a hidden preliminary event or on escaping every public calamity. He says that the dead will not be disadvantaged and that all will be with the Lord. The verbs and images in the passage have been read in more than one way: some picture believers going away with Christ, while others picture a welcoming party meeting an arriving ruler and accompanying him in his victory. The text does not tell the reader the subsequent itinerary. A preacher can have a view of that itinerary. He should say which part is Paul's description and which part is his synthesis.

Another reply observes Matthew's sequence. The gathering of the elect follows the distress he describes, and the coming is visible. Pretribulation readers answer that Matthew is speaking primarily of Israel or of believers who come to faith during a later tribulation, while Paul is addressing the church's earlier gathering. That answer follows from the larger distinction between Israel and church; it is not established by Matthew's words alone. If the distinction is precisely what is under dispute, using it to divide two

similar trumpet-and-gathering scenes risks assuming the conclusion. Yet a critic should not pretend that parallel imagery always denotes exactly the same event. Apocalyptic writing can reuse symbols. Careful readers must argue for their identifications rather than declare them self-evident.

The sentence about one person being taken and another left in Matthew 24 has generated more certainty than it can bear. In the immediate comparison, the flood takes the unprepared away, which gives reason to question the popular picture in which being taken must mean rescue. Stephen Sizer presses that reading and reinforces it with the parable where weeds are gathered before wheat. But the passages are distinct and have different settings; “taken” is not a technical term with one unvarying meaning across them. The observation unsettles a familiar rapture illustration. It does not, by itself, settle every question of timing.

Second Thessalonians demands special care because it addresses alarm itself. Some hear a claim that the day of the Lord has come and fear they have missed what mattered. Paul insists that events associated with rebellion and the lawless one have not yet unfolded. Pretribulation readers can distinguish that day from the church’s gathering, while other readers see Paul joining the coming and gathering too closely for the separation to be easy. Either way, the letter is attempting to steady a community troubled by eschatological claims. It should make a preacher cautious about turning the end into a constant stimulus of alarm. If a prophecy chart repeatedly destabilizes the people it promises to comfort, its pastoral use is open to question even apart from the chronology.

Nor does the debate turn on whether Christ’s coming must be visible or audible. A thoughtful defender of a pretribulation gathering can say that an event heard by those it concerns need not be publicly understood by everyone and that the later manifestation is distinct. Popular storytelling about a completely silent disappearance, however, has a much harder time with Paul’s command and trumpet. Here the gap between a careful doctrinal defense and a dramatic church lesson matters. The latter can become the version that a generation remembers even when scholars of the same persuasion would qualify it.

The history of this timetable matters for similar reasons. Christians long before Scofield confessed the return of Christ and the resurrection. Different churches have read the millennium, the tribulation, and Israel’s future differently. The precise pretribulation scheme associated with nineteenth-century dispensational teaching was a later synthesis, developed by John Nelson Darby and carried through conferences, teachers, institutions, and reference Bibles. Scofield helped make it available at the point of ordinary Bible reading. To call the synthesis later does not automatically make it false; theological understanding can develop. It does make the claim that it is simply what all faithful Christians have always read historically untenable.

The alternatives have histories and difficulties of their own. Some interpreters place the gathering after a period of tribulation, joining it closely to Christ’s public appearing. Others locate it within that period, or understand much of the apocalyptic language as referring first to Jerusalem’s destruction while still awaiting a final return and resurrection. Millennial views also differ about the sequence and nature of Christ’s reign. A crowded catalogue of positions can weary a congregation, which is one reason the simple chart wins. Yet the variety itself is useful evidence: believers who affirm Scripture, resurrection, and the return of Christ have not agreed that readiness depends on one exact sequence. A pastor can teach a conviction without telling a child that uncertainty about its timing is uncertainty about Jesus.

Revelation is especially vulnerable to being used as a numbered checklist. Its visions move through seals, trumpets, bowls, beasts, witnesses, and a final city. Readers differ on whether a sequence of visions corresponds to a single chronological run of future events, cycles back over the same conflict, draws on first-century imperial realities, or combines several horizons. Even within a futurist reading, transitions are

debated. To take an item from a newspaper and assign it to a numbered vision requires an interpretive bridge. The bridge may be plausible; it is still a bridge. It should not be placed under the same degree of certainty as the text's clear condemnation of idolatrous power and its hope for the healing of nations.

The Didache's watchfulness is comparatively spare. Its final warnings are frightening, but the author does not pause to identify an empire by a series of future newspaper equivalents. The earlier chapters tell the hearer to give, reconcile, pray, confess wrongs, discern the character of a prophet, and appoint worthy servants. Those are the activities that would be interrupted if watchfulness were converted into a weekly contest to spot the latest sign. The text has its own difficult expectations and should not be romanticized as a pacifist pamphlet without apocalyptic content. Precisely because its ending is unmistakably apocalyptic, it demonstrates that an apocalyptic Christian community can retain a thick account of daily obligations.

The prophecy clock is another step beyond the textual hope. A clock assigns stages, matches news to stages, and invites a congregation to watch for the next marker. A lesson on Daniel becomes a map of modern capitals; a war becomes a sign; a diplomatic proposal becomes evidence that the final deception is near. Some prophetic readers explicitly resist this practice and warn against date setting. Others feed it. The decisive question is what happens when the habit of fitting events into the sequence becomes stronger than the discipline of learning what the event actually is.

Consider what the clock can do to a report of civilian suffering. If a conflict is understood first as proof that the end is approaching, its victims enter the listener's mind as indicators. That response can coexist with tears and prayers. The listener may sincerely mourn a child and still ask, before anything else, whether the crisis confirms a prophetic scenario. The wrong lies in the priority. Jesus' warnings about readiness are not a command to convert harmed neighbors into evidence that one's chart is working.

I have seen how readily urgency becomes a church product. The speaker says we may not have tomorrow, the music gathers speed, and the altar fills. Some people find a genuine occasion for repentance. Others learn a cycle of terror and relief that needs renewing every few months. A prophecy lesson provides fresh images to keep the cycle moving. I do not claim that every church used fear this way or that a moving service was necessarily manipulative. I claim that the form makes it easy to measure success by intensity while leaving the underlying interpretation unscrutinized.

Popular novels and films have made one version of the rapture vivid enough to feel like a remembered event. They are legitimate objects of literary judgment; a novelist can imagine what a doctrine might mean to a character. The problem arises when the images return to the pulpit as if they were details supplied by Paul. A reader remembers an abandoned child, a vanished pilot, a stunned world, and then finds the Bible passage less specific than the story. Culture has filled a textual gap. I do not fault imagination for doing what it does. I fault a teacher who neglects to tell the congregation which details were imagined.

There is a moral oddity in describing escape as the center of hope while speaking as though a catastrophic war is a necessary component of God's schedule. If I am eager to be taken before suffering, how should I regard the people who remain within it? One response is compassionate mission, and many churches genuinely choose it. Another is fascination with the disaster itself. The rapture may be preached as comfort for the vulnerable or as a theater in which other people's vulnerability gives the saved an exciting view of history. A doctrine cannot be judged solely by its worst performance, but the performance reveals what the doctrine can be made to serve.

Some Christians who reject a pretribulation schedule are tempted to say that the only responsible hope is to build a better world and cease expecting divine intervention. That is not my argument. The resurrection is not a metaphor for gradual social improvement, and Christian hope does not consist in a perfected state

policy. I believe the expectation of Christ’s return can make a congregation patient, brave, and unwilling to absolutize any present nation. If the future belongs to God, no government possesses it. If judgment belongs to Christ, believers ought to tremble before baptizing violence as a shortcut to its arrival.

History also warns against using failed timetables as a way to ridicule everyone who longs for Christ’s return. Longing is not the failure. The failure comes when confident predictions produce contempt for ordinary duties or when each disappointment is repaired by moving the dates while preserving the authority of the predictor. One can be ready for an unknown future and still plant a garden, attend to a sick person, vote with care, and scrutinize an official’s claim. In the parables about readiness, servants are found doing the work entrusted to them. A church waiting for Christ has no permission to neglect the people already at its door.

The practical test is surprisingly plain. Can I hold my theory of the end and still wish that a threatened child lives, that a ceasefire protects civilians, that a starving family receives food, and that political leaders are held to account for what they do? Can I welcome a peace that does not fit my schedule? Can I admit uncertainty about how prophecy unfolds without feeling that Christ’s promise has become less secure? A doctrine of hope that cannot survive those questions has been attached to the clock more tightly than to the Lord it was meant to honor.

Paul did not close his letter with a demand that the Thessalonians identify a sequence of governments. He gave mourners words with which to comfort one another. The living and the dead would be joined in Christ; death would not have the last word. When the sermon turns that consolation into a countdown, I want to place it beside Paul’s original grief. The empty chair should remind us of a person missed, not provide a prop for delight in everyone who might be left behind. Read from there, the promise is still extraordinary. It simply asks for a different kind of attention.

Chapter 16: Tolstoy Against Church and State

Tolstoy asks a question that can embarrass a room without raising his voice: if Jesus forbids retaliation and commands love for an enemy, how does a Christian learn to kill the enemy on command? The answer usually arrives in the name of a second obligation. One must obey the state, protect the innocent, deter aggression, or prevent a greater evil. These obligations cannot be waved away. Yet neither can the words of Jesus be dismissed as a private ideal that somehow stops applying the moment a person wears a uniform or votes on an appropriation. Tolstoy made the gap between profession and public conduct the central problem of his religious writing. His solution is more radical than mine. His question remains inescapable.

In The Kingdom of God Is Within You he argues that Christianity was converted into an institution that praises a command and arranges for its habitual violation. The churches teach love of enemies while blessing the military order that organizes the killing of enemies. They solemnize oaths that make the individual's conscience available to authorities. They can denounce murder between neighbors while describing murder between states as duty. Tolstoy's language is often sweeping and sometimes unjust to particular Christians. Its power comes from noticing that a moral command has been partitioned, with the largest and most organized exceptions occupying the realm of public necessity.

He did not invent Christian nonviolence. In that book he recognized predecessors, including Quakers, Mennonites, and the American abolitionist and peace writer Adin Ballou. He regarded their refusal to treat Jesus' command as impossible as evidence that the churches had not exhausted the Christian response. This matters because Tolstoy is sometimes treated as a lone eccentric who converted a poetic sentence into an unworkable political theory. His claim was both scriptural and historical: communities had attempted to obey, and the official churches had found ways to regard their obedience as marginal.

The Didache sharpened his historical claim. Its first chapters present a way of life in which love is directed even toward those who harm the disciple. It instructs hearers to turn the other cheek, to give rather than grasp, to refuse violent acts and the passions from which they grow. It condemns falsehood and acquisitiveness along with more obvious injuries. It does not offer a modern manual of military ethics or a detailed theory of the state. Tolstoy's conclusion that all participation in state coercion is forbidden goes beyond what its author says. But he was not wrong to recognize an early Christian teaching that would make the casual blessing of war morally suspect.

His treatment of the oath exposes the problem in miniature. Jesus' instruction in the Sermon on the Mount directs the disciple toward plain truthfulness rather than elaborate swearing. A citizen may promise to serve a government; a soldier may promise to obey lawful commands; a public official may swear fidelity to a constitution. Many Christians believe these pledges can be made honestly and subject to God's higher authority. Tolstoy thought the very mechanism by which a person promised future obedience to a coercive institution was dangerous. At the moment of oath, one cannot know what particular act will later be demanded. The oath binds the conscience before the test arrives.

I can see why the distinction between lawful and unlawful commands matters. Refusing a criminal order is a real duty, and some people have done so at considerable personal cost. Still, the oath can create an enormous burden of interpretation in precisely the moment when disobedience is dangerous. Tolstoy asks us to notice the ordinary psychological pressure to call an order lawful because one's career, unit, neighbors, and government have already called it necessary. The obligation of conscience may remain on paper while the institution trains people to feel that its use would be betrayal.

Compulsory military service made the contradiction visible in Tolstoy's Russia and in the Europe he observed. A government could demand that a young person perform violence for reasons the person did not choose and perhaps could not verify. The claim of national protection could conceal the defense of rank, wealth, territory, or prestige. Tolstoy's refusal was not only an appeal to tenderness. It was an argument about knowledge and authority. The state asks a person to transfer judgment about life and death to people far above him, then calls the transfer patriotism. He urged the person to withdraw consent from that machinery.

His opposition to violence did not become approval of revolutionary terror. A rebel who kills officials in order to replace them with a just order has already adopted the state's basic grammar: force establishes the future. Tolstoy expected change from truth spoken and lived, from refusals to serve coercive systems, from mutual aid and the exposure of deception. He did not believe a purified state could be built by a sufficiently righteous campaign of killing. One can find this politically naive. It is nevertheless a consistent refusal to treat the weapon as morally transformed by the slogan attached to it.

When I read him beside my own experience of church, I do not need to pretend that Pentecostal worship in Kansas resembled the Russian Orthodox establishment. The social histories differ. Our congregations did not have an imperial church's legal authority. Many members had modest incomes and little control over a government's policy. The comparison concerns a habit of permission. A preacher can ask people to believe Jesus' words literally in matters of healing, demonic power, or the imminent end, and then treat his plain commands about the enemy as poetic exaggerations once a nation goes to war. A person may put on a "Jesus face" for a song and remove the face when the sermon turns to an adversary abroad.

I have heard Christians state the objection to Tolstoy in its most compelling form. What if a violent attacker threatens a child? What if a nation is invaded? If I restrain the attacker, have I disobeyed Christ? If a country does not defend its residents, do its leaders abandon the vulnerable to those willing to use force? These are not debating tricks when the threatened person is real. Tolstoy answered that violence perpetuates the very order it claims to prevent and that no person is authorized to make another's death a means. Many Christian traditions answer that restrained force can be an act of neighbor-love in tragic conditions. The argument between them cannot be ended by citing a hypothetical child as though the whole pattern of organized warfare consisted of single rescues with perfectly known facts.

Romans 13 is often set against Tolstoy at this point. Paul speaks of governing authority as a servant with a sword, while Jesus in Matthew 5 tells his hearers to turn from retaliation and love enemies. A reader may infer that the state bears a coercive task the disciple does not bear personally. That is a serious reading, and the church has developed accounts of legitimate authority from it. But Paul's description of an authority does not say that every command or campaign of an authority is righteous. Nor does it authorize a Christian to identify the "servant" by national preference and ignore another government's claim to the same vocabulary. Revelation portrays a beastly empire demanding worship; Acts depicts apostles refusing an order that conflicts with their witness. The New Testament contains both recognition and resistance.

Tolstoy's resolution was to read Jesus' prohibition as governing the Christian without a public exception, and to regard the state's use of the sword as part of a worldly order the Christian should cease to serve. The Didache's Way of Life gives him powerful moral support but does not work through the Pauline passage or tell its readers how to govern an army. A Christian who rejects his resolution must still explain the relationship between the two texts. Saying "Romans 13" without naming a limit lets a government turn a Christian's Bible into a warrant for itself. Saying "Matthew 5" without attending to the protection of

threatened neighbors risks treating their peril as someone else's cost of my purity. The debate is difficult because love is not an abstraction on either side.

There is a practical way for a church to expose a false certainty even before it agrees on pacifism. It can ask whether the testimony of victims has been heard; whether the language of "defense" has been used to excuse attacks on people who did not attack; whether the claimed necessity is open to public scrutiny; and whether the church would use the same moral standard if another state performed the act. These questions do not replace biblical reasoning. They discipline the movement from biblical principle to a public endorsement. Tolstoy would likely ask for still more, namely a refusal to participate. A congregation that cannot even ask the preliminary questions has not earned the right to dismiss him as unrealistic.

The child in the hypothetical has often become an alibi for actions nowhere near immediate defense. A campaign of bombing, siege, collective punishment, hostage taking, or forced displacement cannot acquire the moral clarity of pulling an attacker away from a victim merely because its advocate begins the speech with "What if your family were threatened?" The question of actual means, targets, necessity, proportionality, and civilian harm remains. Tolstoy pushes me to suspect any organization that makes its own necessity the reason that others may be killed. A just-war critic of Tolstoy can accept the force of that suspicion while arguing that some carefully bounded defenses remain possible.

I do not resolve that dispute by becoming Tolstoy in every theological or political respect. I believe the risen Christ is more than a teacher of moral law, and I do not think that every instance of public authority is merely disguised violence. A court can protect a person from exploitation; a public institution can distribute food, maintain water, or constrain the strong. Those acts may be imperfect and intertwined with coercion, but it does not follow that a Christian must regard every institution as the enemy of the kingdom. The New Testament itself includes positive as well as critical statements about rulers, while the crucifixion displays what power can do when it declares the innocent disposable.

The phrase "within you" has sometimes been heard as a withdrawal from public affairs. Tolstoy meant something more disruptive. A kingdom that begins in conscience changes the person's willingness to lend a body, voice, money, or obedience to public violence. It is inward in its source and unavoidably social in its consequences. Yet if the kingdom were only an inward decision, it could not sustain the Didache's shared baptism, prayer, meal, almsgiving, and appointment of ministers. Tolstoy's inward appeal needs the communal form that he was too ready to suspect. This is where the ancient manual first begins to criticize its modern admirer.

The authority he rejected included religious authority. He accused churches of obscuring the teachings of Jesus with doctrines ordinary people were ordered to believe and rituals they were assured would save them. He saw a profitable alliance: the state conferred status and protection on the church, and the church taught citizens that obedience to the state could be sacred. In his context that accusation had concrete targets. It would be careless to copy it wholesale onto every parish and denomination. Clergy have also resisted wars, sheltered the persecuted, and challenged governments. But the existence of such courage does not acquit a church that uses sacred language to make state violence feel like piety.

The question of the state's identity matters when Christians discuss Israel. The State of Israel is a state; its government, like every government, can act justly or unjustly and must be judged by evidence and law. Jewish people are not collectively its government. A criticism of a policy or a military operation is not a criticism of Jews as Jews. An attack on Jewish civilians is not an act of theology's correction. Tolstoy's suspicion of nationalist sacralization can help an American church resist giving an allied state divine immunity. It cannot justify erasing Jewish fear, history, or the right to live safely. Nor can it be made into a

claim that Palestinians alone have moral obligations because their resistance is visible through the lens of violence. Every party's acts require judgment.

Tolstoy could have asked an American believer why support for a distant war can feel like fidelity when the believer has neither read the relevant evidence nor met the people who will bear the cost. The question is not whether geographic distance makes moral judgment impossible. It is whether a church has outsourced that judgment to a chart, a national leader, a television commentator, or a ministry that has learned to mobilize its members. Political leaders often possess more information than a citizen, but they also possess interests. A Christian who cannot examine a public claim need not pretend to know everything. She can refuse to describe destruction as holy while the evidence is still contested.

In my own churches, the language of spiritual warfare could turn ordinary disagreement into a struggle between light and darkness. Used carefully, it can name the seriousness of evil and the need for courage. Used carelessly, it attaches the enemy's identity to human beings rather than to the falsehood and violence that entangle all sides. Tolstoy's interpretation of Jesus presses against that substitution. The person called my enemy remains a person. If I become unable to imagine his mother grieving him, the word "love" has been reduced to a signal that I belong to the correct side.

Yet Tolstoy's account can also be too swift in moving from the command to love a person to a complete set of conclusions about every institutional response. The decision whether to intervene to stop an aggressor, how to restrain without vengeance, whether sanctions harm the vulnerable more than leaders, and when refusing service exposes others to greater danger requires further moral reasoning. Churches cannot solve these cases by announcing "nonresistance" with the same empty confidence with which they once announced "war." His reading changes the burden of proof. It does not relieve anyone of the need to examine a concrete situation.

The burden is substantial. The person defending force must show how the force protects rather than merely retaliates; how civilians are distinguished; why lesser harms are unavailable; how the means remain bounded; and who can review the outcome when the powerful have reasons to conceal it. Tolstoy suspected that these conditions would collapse in practice, particularly at the scale of war. There is evidence enough in every century to make the suspicion intelligible. A person who rejects absolute pacifism should not use the existence of a principled defensive exception to excuse the routine conduct of states.

For Tolstoy, refusing the oath and the rifle was a form of truth telling. It disclosed that the emperor's demand could not be ultimate. An American Christian can make a less total refusal while still asking whose authority is treated as final when a government's policy collides with the command to love a neighbor. A church can support Jewish and Palestinian safety, press for civilian protection, refuse group blame, question weapons that foreseeably destroy civilian life, and care for refugees. Each action will have to be assessed for its effects. None requires a church to pretend that a biblical promise has transferred moral immunity to a state.

The Didache's test for a teacher says that conduct matters. A prophet who speaks truth but fails to do it is false in the community's practical judgment. Tolstoy applies that principle to an institution that calls itself Christian while teaching followers to ignore the most inconvenient commands of Christ. I think his application is sometimes too indiscriminate. He speaks as though one contradiction can identify all ecclesial life as fraud. The Didache itself would not permit that conclusion so easily; it preserves offices, common worship, and a process of correction. But it gives him a test we ought to apply to ourselves. If my church names the Way of Life and trains its members to bless avoidable death, what have we been taught to call life?

Tolstoy made the individual asked to serve in uniform a test of Christian conscience. I end with a congregation. Its decisions are less dramatic and more cumulative. It chooses whose testimony to hear, what claims to repeat, where to send money, whether to complain when a policy makes civilians unsafe, and whether to pray for an enemy in language that imagines the enemy as human. It can become complicit without ordering a single shot. It can also interrupt a pattern of assent without claiming to have solved the question of every war. Tolstoy's uncompromising question belongs in that interruption. The Didache asks the congregation to make the interruption a way of life.

Chapter 17: Where Tolstoy Selects

I agree with Tolstoy that a church cannot declare itself Christian by preserving the right words while refusing the life those words require. That agreement is why I have brought him into this book. It is also why I must not turn him into the next authority in the margin, printed below the Didache and explaining in advance which of its words may count. He found in the ancient teaching a Christian moral seriousness that embarrassed the church of his day. He did not receive everything he found there on equal terms. My own paper on Tolstoy and the Didache describes his work as a selective reconstruction, a genuine recovery of the Way of Life that narrows the worshiping and expectant world in which that way was practiced. I want the reader to see the selection before deciding whether to share it.

The interpretive problem is the boundary Tolstoy effectively draws after the Way of Life. The Didache's moral opening can be made to look like its essential core if the remaining chapters are treated only as evidence of later church habits. Scholars do debate the text's layers, dating, and relation to Jewish Two Ways traditions. Those questions cannot be settled by the convenience of a modern reformer's thesis. In the received ancient text, moral instruction passes into initiation, common worship, accountable leadership, and future hope. Tolstoy is free to argue against any of those practices, but he cannot make their presence irrelevant merely by calling the opening chapters simpler or more original.

Tolstoy had reasons for privileging the first part. The commands of Jesus had struck him as intelligible and urgent after he grew dissatisfied with dogmatic formulas that he thought people recited without living. A text beginning with an actionable Way of Life appeared as a witness from near Christianity's beginning against a religion organized around assent and ritual. Its prohibitions of anger, greed, sexual exploitation, lying, and violence supported his sense that moral conduct was central. He adapted and presented the text for readers he hoped might act on it. His intervention was neither an antiquarian hobby nor a transparent translation without a theological purpose.

The first complication is baptism. The Didache instructs baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, preferably in living water, while making practical allowances for other water and pouring if immersion is unavailable. The practical flexibility is striking; the act and the name remain. Tolstoy rejected the later church's doctrinal formulas and the claim that a ritual itself could save an unrepentant person. I share the objection to treating a performed rite as a substitute for changed life. But the Didache does not present moral apprenticeship as a reason to omit baptism. It presents the Way as teaching given before baptism. Instruction and initiation belong to the same communal sequence.

Nor may the baptismal formula be drafted too easily into a later doctrinal debate. The Didache's use of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not a chapter from a fourth-century creed. A reader should not pretend that it states every proposition later defended at Nicaea or Constantinople. It still makes Tolstoy's exclusively moral reconstruction less plausible. The community did not baptize in the name of an abstract law of love. It named God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit in an act marking allegiance and belonging. If Tolstoy finds the exact theological content of that act mistaken, he may say so. He cannot say that the earliest witness he chose as an ally never practiced it.

The next complication is time. The Didache prescribes fasts on particular days and the Lord's Prayer three times daily. Tolstoy could applaud simplicity and regular devotion while distrusting routine religion. The ancient text is not especially interested in the modern distinction between spontaneous authenticity and fixed form. A rhythm can become empty, certainly. It can also hold a community to a discipline when enthusiasm fades. A church with a repeated prayer has to confront Jesus' words about forgiveness every

time it prays them, provided anyone is still listening. My own tradition often prized an unscripted movement of the Spirit. I can appreciate that freedom while admitting that spontaneity did not guarantee attention to an injured neighbor. The early Christians did not assume that schedule and sincerity were enemies.

The prayers over cup and bread create a still harder question. The Didache gives thanks for God’s gifts through Jesus and asks that the church be gathered, as grain once scattered comes into one bread. It restricts participation to the baptized. Interpreters disagree about the precise relation of these prayers to later Eucharistic liturgies; they should not be made to speak in the technical vocabulary of every subsequent church. They do show a communal meal with sacred boundaries and a theological horizon wider than the individual’s decision to live well. The grateful community receives life and knowledge through Jesus and looks toward fulfillment. Even if a reader declines later sacramental explanations, there is no case for reducing the meal to a convenient illustration attached to ethics.

I can understand why Tolstoy feared the power of ritual to obscure morality. A person may receive communion and continue to exploit workers. A church may bless weapons with the same ceremonial hands that distribute bread. That contradiction is not made less severe by a sophisticated theology of sacrament. The correction, however, need not be the removal of a shared table. It can be a demand that the table expose the contradiction. When a congregation says its scattered members have become one loaf while it trains them to regard a distant baptized Christian as expendable, the prayer itself becomes a witness against the congregation. A Palestinian Christian cannot be an abstraction at the very moment the church thanks God for gathering its people from the ends of the earth.

Another complication is authority. The Didache distrusts a teacher who asks for money, stays too long at another’s expense, or preaches truth he does not practice. It gives a community criteria for discerning a genuine prophet. Tolstoy would have welcomed that suspicion of religious status and income. Yet the same manual makes provision for trustworthy teachers and tells the community to appoint bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord. Its offices are not the later imperial church. The words do not authorize every hierarchy that subsequently claimed apostolic ancestry. They do mean that early Christianity was not simply a collection of solitary consciences without recognized service, accountability, and organized worship.

The contrast matters for a reformer tempted to equate institution with corruption. An officer can abuse power; a community without any public procedure can be captured by the most confident speaker. The Didache’s tests imply that authority may be recognized, examined, and withdrawn. In modern church life, this is more demanding than either automatic submission or generalized anti-clericalism. A pastor needs correction and a member needs a way to raise it. A traveling teacher’s large audience is not evidence that his doctrine or behavior has passed examination. Tolstoy’s distrust is salutary; the ancient community’s provision for accountable order is salutary too.

The last complication is hope. Chapter sixteen tells believers to watch, warns of deception and trial, and speaks of the Lord coming with his saints and a resurrection of the dead. Its images are not a polished systematic eschatology. It does not teach Scofield’s dispensations or provide his sequence of removals and tribulation. It also cannot be reduced to the proposition that love will gradually change society if enough people refuse violence. The community believes that its future depends upon divine action beyond its present capacity. Tolstoy tended to interpret the kingdom as a moral and spiritual reality that becomes visible through changed life. That insight illuminates the Didache’s first chapters. It leaves the final one only partly explained.

The tension extends to Jesus himself. Tolstoy took Jesus above all as the revealer of a law of life. His rejection of miracles, incarnational doctrine, and bodily resurrection was connected to his conviction that the gospel's truth ought to be rationally accessible and practiced. The Didache is not a developed treatise on the two natures of Christ. It speaks of Jesus in prayer, baptism, thanksgiving, and expectation, in language that must be read on its own early terms. Still, its community is doing something more than honoring a deceased moral instructor. It asks God to gather the church into the kingdom, invokes Jesus in its worship, and awaits the Lord. A selective retrieval may bring its ethics forward; it cannot claim that the text itself shares Tolstoy's full account of Jesus.

Paul makes the doctrinal stakes explicit in a way the Didache does not. In 1 Corinthians 15 he argues that if the dead are not raised, Christian proclamation and hope are emptied, and he places Christ's resurrection at the center of that claim. I cannot simply set Paul aside because a Tolstoyan reading makes the imperative to love the enemy more immediate. Nor can a defender of resurrection use Paul's argument to evade the imperative. The Christian confession is that the crucified one lives; the ethical demand and the hope are bound to the same person. A church can betray him by making resurrection a spectacular future escape while forgetting his command. A moralist can diminish the same witness by preserving the command and disposing of the event that the apostles considered decisive.

Tolstoy's method raises an additional problem about the canon. Why should the Didache be decisive as evidence of the earliest church when it agrees with one's moral judgment, yet secondary when its baptism, communal prayer, offices, and future hope resist that judgment? Ancient proximity is evidence, not automatic authority. A Christian may judge a noncanonical text by the canon, and one may disagree with its practice. Tolstoy's selection is legitimate as an argument for what he believes; it is insufficient as a demonstration that primitive Christianity had no other essential elements. The same standard applies when I appeal to the Didache against Scofield. Its older date cannot make every line infallible. Its importance lies in showing that a real early community held together practices that our modern systems often pull apart.

To call this selection is not to say Tolstoy misquoted every passage or acted in bad faith. Every interpreter chooses emphases and relates a text to questions the first audience could not have anticipated. I have done so by placing an ancient manual beside a twentieth-century reference Bible and a contemporary war. The question is whether the interpreter allows the parts that resist his thesis to speak as evidence against him. Tolstoy's version of primitive Christianity is strongest as a critique of a church that had become at ease with wealth and killing. It is weakest as a claim that the earliest Christians held an ethical teaching separable from baptism, thanksgiving, ministry, and the risen Lord's return.

My agreement with him is therefore substantial and limited. I accept his insistence that Christ's commands cannot be kept as ornaments around an institution's normal pursuit of power. I want him to interrupt a sermon that turns violence into exciting prophecy. But I do not want to trade the resurrection for a metaphor of moral improvement or the body of Christ for the isolated conscience of an admirable moral person. Grace is not an excuse to avoid obedience. It is the reason obedience can be more than a performance of willpower. The church's practices, at their best, train people in received mercy and shared responsibility; at their worst, they mask the failure to show either.

Here I must also correct an easy opposition between Tolstoy and Scofield. Scofield did not forbid good works, and Tolstoy did not merely preach a secular ethic under Christian names. Scofield's notes arose in a movement that practiced evangelism and supported real institutions of care. Tolstoy believed he was recovering the teaching of Jesus and the meaning of the kingdom, not writing a handbook of unbelief. Their disagreement lies in what each allowed to organize the Christian reading of the whole. Scofield's

dispensational architecture made divisions and futures unusually legible. Tolstoy's moral reason made commands of Jesus unusually hard to evade. Both approaches could become controlling filters. The Didache must be allowed to test each rather than awarded wholly to one.

I can imagine a reader in a Pentecostal church hearing a lesson about the end and then receiving an invitation to the altar. It would be too simple to say that the room should instead have held a seminar on Greek manuscripts. Repentance can be real in an emotionally charged room. But after the service, what exactly has a person learned to do? The Didache could offer a modest answer: reconcile before the shared meal, care for the needy, test the teacher by conduct, pray with regularity, refuse destructive anger, and keep watch. Its program is not a complete answer to the historical conflict in Gaza. It would make an American church less able to speak of that conflict only as a succession of signs.

The two-ways image also contains a danger if it is turned into a new binary of our own. We could put Scofield and everyone influenced by him on the Way of Death, Tolstoy and everyone sympathetic to him on the Way of Life, and congratulate ourselves for reading an ancient text. That would reproduce the simplification we object to. The paths name patterns of conduct to be discerned in every person and community, including mine. A reader may hold a dispensational account of Israel and still rescue a threatened Palestinian. A reader may quote Tolstoy on nonviolence and circulate an antisemitic insinuation. The Didache's question is not whether I have acquired the right ancestral intellectual label. It is whether the teaching forms my speech, money, loyalties, and treatment of others.

This is where the reading becomes uncomfortable for me. I can write a forceful criticism of church entertainment and enjoy the performance of forcefulness. I can denounce the "Jesus face" and acquire a new face of superior seriousness. I can compile evidence about genocide and spend more energy winning the argument than hearing a witness. Tolstoy's demand to act interrupts that vanity, and the Didache's corporate discipline makes it harder to hide inside private sincerity. If a book about complicity does not include the author's risk of self-exemption, it has already failed the test it applies to the church.

There is no need to choose between a thoughtless ritualist and a rootless moralist. The Didache's sequence gives a way of asking whether the practice bears the fruit it signifies. Baptism marks a person who has been taught the Way; it does not certify that instruction will never be needed again. A shared meal announces unity; it obliges the participants to repair the divisions they discover. Appointment to ministry gives service a name; it exposes the minister to judgment by conduct. Watching for the Lord discourages complacency; it does not license neglect of the people with whom one waits. Tolstoy's challenge should be pressed into each practice rather than positioned outside the door to forbid all practice.

I have called this chapter "Where Tolstoy Selects" because selection is the pivot of the book. Scofield selects a network of cross references and prophetic types and allows it to frame the Bible. Tolstoy selects the moral teaching nearest his vision of Jesus and treats other early practices with suspicion. Sizer will select seven popular claims for direct biblical rebuttal. I, too, select passages and voices. No honest book can abolish selection. It can show its criteria, include evidence that resists its preferred thesis, and let affected people interrupt a neat conclusion. The ancient text does not become a judge because it answers every modern question. It judges us by refusing to be only the portion most convenient for our cause.

As we revisit the dispute about land and prophecy, the distinction between a faithful critique and a replacement system matters. Tolstoy has helped me see how easily a church can bless state violence while preaching Jesus. The Didache has stopped me from claiming that faithful Christianity consists only in one thinker's reconstruction of Jesus' ethical commands. That double correction leaves a demanding task: to read a biblical argument carefully, to scrutinize the conduct of the teacher who offers it, and to recognize a

neighbor whom the argument might harm. Stephen Sizer's challenge belongs at this point because he asks the church to reopen its inherited readings. He, too, must be read under those tests.

Chapter 18: Sizer’s Challenge

Stephen Sizer asks Christians to go back to the passages they think they already know. His short study, Seven Biblical Answers to Popular Zionist Assumptions, addresses the blessing of Abraham, the identity of God’s chosen people, the land, Jerusalem, a future temple, the rapture, and the relation of Israel to the church. It is a compact polemic, not a neutral survey of everything Christian scholars have written. Its value lies in making familiar claims answerable to familiar texts. He will not let a preacher stop at Genesis 12 before Galatians 3, or speak of an exclusive land claim without hearing Leviticus and the prophets.

This is why I wanted him in the room with Scofield. A church member accustomed to one reference system might think the alternative is disbelief in Scripture. Sizer takes Scripture with complete seriousness and asks whether the system has been mistaken for it. He reads Abraham’s blessing through Christ, identifies faith rather than ancestry as the way into the redeemed people, and speaks of Jews and Gentiles reconciled in one body. He asks what it means to call the land God’s when people claim absolute ownership over it. The questions unsettle a chart without requiring anyone to abandon the Bible.

His public conduct must also be faced. In December 2022 a Church of England disciplinary tribunal found that, by posting a link to an article suggesting Israel was responsible for the September 11 attacks, Sizer had engaged in antisemitic activity. It found other conduct unbecoming of a minister, and the penalty prohibited him from licensed ministry until 2030. Sizer disputed the tribunal’s characterization. I reject the conspiracy claim and the act of giving it an audience. This finding cannot simply be hidden because I find parts of his biblical argument persuasive. Neither does it decide, without exegesis, what Galatians or Romans means. I have refused to make Scofield’s disputed biography a substitute for reading his notes; I must apply the same discipline to Sizer while taking the particular harm of antisemitic insinuation seriously.

The problem with a conspiratorial suggestion is more than that it lacks adequate evidence. It turns Jews into a hidden collective agent behind a catastrophe and teaches the audience to read world events through suspicion of a people. That habit can attach itself to a righteous concern for Palestinians and corrupt it from within. It has no place in my criticism of Christian Zionism. The proper objects of political scrutiny are stated policies, identified officials and organizations, documented funding and lobbying, publicly assessable decisions, and the consequences for human beings. A church that has learned to question Scofield’s footnotes must not exchange them for an insinuation masquerading as an explanation of everything.

The tribunal did not adjudicate his seven biblical answers. But its finding matters to a reader assessing a teacher, particularly in a book that has just treated the Didache’s tests for traveling prophets. A teacher can state a sound objection to a land-promise slogan and still fail a test of truthfulness or judgment in another public act. I am not entitled to isolate doctrine from the responsibility of teaching. Nor am I entitled to pretend that a moral failure makes the words of Paul change. Keeping those two propositions together is less satisfying than either excusing Sizer or throwing his entire argument into the fire. It is more honest.

His first challenge concerns the familiar blessing and curse of Genesis 12. A speaker can move from God’s address to Abram to a demand that Christians support every policy of Israel, sometimes without acknowledging the move. Sizer notes the promise was spoken to Abram and insists that the New Testament locates its blessing in Christ. He is right that the modern political demand is not contained in the ancient sentence. A critic can accept that point without claiming that God’s dealings with Abraham’s descendants

have no significance. Romans 11 prevents an easy conclusion of that kind. The stronger argument is that neither descendant nor believer has been authorized to turn the promise into immunity from judgment.

Sizer next challenges the idea that election grants one contemporary population exclusive moral priority. Scripture's concern for the stranger, along with Paul's account of heirs in Christ, cuts against a theology of racial privilege. Yet his sharp way of saying that the New Testament calls only Christ's followers chosen should be handled carefully. In Romans 11 Paul still speaks of the Jewish people as beloved with regard to election on account of the patriarchs. A reader can dispute how that election relates to salvation and future history. The reader cannot treat the sentence as if it were absent. If I use Sizer to replace a simplistic slogan with a new one, I have learned the wrong lesson from him.

The land argument is more substantial than a slogan. Sizer holds together God's ownership in Leviticus, Ezekiel's rebuke of violent claimants, the promised inheritance of foreigners in Ezekiel's vision, and Hebrews' picture of patriarchs longing for a city beyond their temporary residence. Together they challenge the assumption that a divine gift can be held apart from justice. His critics answer that conditions on residence and temporary exile do not negate the final commitment to restore Israel. That reply has force in Deuteronomy and the prophets. The two sides are often arguing past each other: one contests the idea of unconditional political entitlement now; the other defends the reliability of an eventual divine promise. Those propositions are not exact opposites.

Sizer's treatment of Jerusalem also presses a neglected question. The biblical city gathers the nations in visions of worship and peace. Psalm 87 can imagine people from foreign nations counted as born in Zion. The final visions of a new Jerusalem are capacious, full of life and healing. These texts make an exclusionary theology of the city difficult to sustain. They do not by themselves determine the municipal arrangement of an existing city, the rights of its residents, or a negotiated political status. Christians should neither pretend that a poetic and prophetic vision is a zoning ordinance nor use the absence of an ordinance to stop asking what kind of city the vision commends.

The future temple is another place where theological inference often becomes public certainty. Sizer points to Jesus' body, the torn curtain, and the church as a dwelling of God. He asks why Christians should regard the rebuilding of a sacrificial structure as a necessary condition for Christ's return when the New Testament has already reoriented temple imagery around him. The question is powerful, especially if popular prophecy treats a future building as an occasion for excitement without facing what it would mean for Jewish worship or for the Muslims who pray at a site of profound importance to them. But passages in Daniel and 2 Thessalonians remain difficult. Some interpreters think those texts anticipate a future profanation in a temple; others connect them to first-century events or broader patterns of rebellion. Sizer's confident denial of any future temple is itself an interpretation, not a line printed in every relevant passage.

On the rapture, his study juxtaposes the public gathering in Matthew with Paul's loud announcement in Thessalonians and challenges the idea of a secret removal before tribulation. I find the challenge persuasive against the popular drama of unexplained disappearances. The timing question is harder. A careful pretribulation reader distinguishes the passages and argues from a wider sequence. Sizer thinks the distinction is imposed. We cannot settle the dispute by repeating either sentence more loudly. We have to ask why the texts should be divided into events or read as different angles on one coming, and what doctrinal work the distinction performs.

His final question is whether God has one people or two. Here Sizer's use of the olive tree and Ephesians' reconciled body reaches the heart of the matter. Gentile Christians have been grafted in; they were strangers and now share the inheritance. If the system maintains a permanent partition, what exactly has been

reconciled? The force of his question should not be lost. Neither should Paul's repeated concern for his own kin. A claim that there is one way of mercy and one shared body need not declare that Jewish people have become an indistinguishable residue within a predominantly Gentile church. The future of Israel remains a serious theological question even after a chart has been corrected.

Darrell Bock offers one of the most responsible replies to Sizer's land argument. In his reading, the widening of Abraham's promise to Gentiles through Christ does not cancel the specific promise to Israel. God can keep a particular commitment and widen its benefits. Bock turns to repeated promises in Genesis, the possibility of restoration after judgment in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah's hope of return, and New Testament passages that leave Israel's future in view. He describes the goal as reconciliation and peace among nations, not a celebration of nationalism. This is a stronger case than a slogan about blessing any state action.

It also puts a fair pressure on my own reading. If I say the inheritance is widened to the world, why must that widening eliminate a particular land? A future fulfilled promise could be both particular and inclusive. If I say the land's residents were judged for wrongdoing, why should judgment make the ancient promise void rather than lead to restoration? I cannot simply cite Galatians as if Bock had never read it. He places Christ at the center too. The dispute concerns whether Christ's fulfillment leaves a specific national component still to be realized.

My answer is partly theological and partly a refusal to pretend that the theological answer decides more than it does. I believe the apostles' account of inheritance in Christ and one reconciled body gives Christians strong reason to resist a permanently partitioned destiny. I also think the final shape of Israel's future remains less explicit than either side sometimes says. What is clear enough for public morality is narrower and firmer: even if a particular land promise remains, no reader has shown that every action of the present state fulfills it or that other inhabitants lose their rights. The link from eventual promise to a present exemption is missing. A conscientious dispensationalist can acknowledge that gap without abandoning the doctrine.

Bock's later writing about the conflict makes the distinction concrete. He maintains his covenantal argument and condemns ethnic cleansing and disproportionate violence. He disputes the genocide description that I use; that factual and legal disagreement has to be addressed on its own evidence. Yet his refusal to infer a permit for violence from a land promise is itself an important counterexample to any claim that every dispensationalist must welcome Palestinian suffering. My criticism concerns an identifiable public use of the theology, not a prediction about the character of every person who holds some part of it.

Sizer, in turn, cannot be made into a shortcut around the difficulty of Jewish history. A Christian argument that the promises find their fulfillment in Jesus has too often been delivered with an ugly second sentence: therefore the Jewish people have been rejected, their memory can be appropriated, or their safety does not matter. Sizer's own argument is about inclusion through faith, but the history of Christian anti-Judaism means that a reader must say out loud what is not being claimed. Criticism of the state of Israel and of Christian Zionist interpretations is not permission to target Jews as Jews. The fact that some advocates weaponize accusations of antisemitism against legitimate criticism does not make actual antisemitism less real.

There is a corresponding difficulty for those who oppose Sizer. Their memory of the church's mistreatment of Jews may make them reluctant to criticize Israeli actions. That reluctance can begin in a humane place. But the protection of Jewish life and the evaluation of a government are distinct duties. Jewish people themselves disagree about governments, wars, and theology. Treating them as a single political will in

order to express Christian solidarity is another way of failing to see them as people. A church can reject replacement theology, remember the Holocaust, resist antisemitism, and still ask whether civilians are being subjected to unlawful and intolerable harm.

One reason this debate goes badly in churches is that rival systems offer rival forms of relief. Scofield's chart offers the relief of finding every people and age in its appointed place. Sizer's short answers can seem to offer the relief of overturning each appointment with a decisive verse. I am persuaded by much of Sizer's criticism, but I do not want a new set of footnotes whose position under the verse exempts them from examination. If Romans 11 corrects an overconfident dispensationalism, it must also correct any Christian who uses the word "fulfillment" to cease caring about Jews. If Ezekiel corrects entitlement, it must correct a critic who assumes that the ancient people's hope was unreal.

The same fairness should be extended to communities whose histories neither author can capture in a short theological exchange. Jewish interpreters read the Hebrew Scriptures without accepting the claim that Jesus is the promised Messiah; Palestinians of several faiths read the land through their own experience of home and loss. The Christian debate cannot require these neighbors to accept its premises before their testimony counts. When the book turns to civic consequences, their accounts and the public record must be heard on their own terms. Sizer and Bock illuminate what Christians ought to believe and say; neither can replace the people affected by what Christians help their governments do.

Imagine the ordinary reader at a table with two study Bibles and a printed copy of Sizer's seven answers. One note points to a national future, another commentary points to the worldwide inheritance, and Sizer asks the reader to see the stranger. The reader has not failed by admitting that some passages remain hard. The failure would be to close the books, choose a side in a present war by reflex, and call that reflex the voice of Scripture. Better to return to the text, the people, and the consequences of one's public claim.

The debate also tests the meaning of fidelity. A pastor may say that to question the land promise is to call God a liar. Another may say that to recognize any future for Israel is to abandon the gospel. Both charges force a choice before the person has been allowed to think. God's faithfulness is the very matter under discussion, and Christians have disagreed about its pattern while reading the same canon. The disagreement is grave but it need not be a contest to determine who loves Scripture. Its seriousness should make a speaker more exact, not more theatrical.

The distinction matters in a local church. A congregant can ask whether the promise to Abraham applies to a proposed weapons shipment and be answered as though she has denied God's covenant. Another can ask whether Jewish fear after a massacre deserves attention and be answered as though he has excused every act of a government. These replies do not expose the questions' errors. They protect the speaker from answering them. Sizer's short study is most helpful when it reopens the first question; Bock's account is most helpful when it refuses to let the second question be buried. Serious disagreement should enlarge moral attention rather than ration it.

Sizer's enduring challenge is therefore methodological as much as doctrinal. He makes Christians read past the verse that first seemed to settle the matter. His own answers must be read past their first persuasive sentence as well. The Bible is not helped when we replace one authoritative margin with another. It is helped when a congregation can hear a claim, ask which passage supports it, read the passage in its own argument, hear the strongest objection, and still remember the neighbor affected by the conclusion. That practice will not yield a single timetable for every reader. It may keep a timetable from becoming an excuse to ignore a living person.

Tolstoy would add a more severe question: what will the reader do tomorrow? The question is necessary, though it is not sufficient. A correct answer to Romans 11 could be recited by a person who will never challenge a public lie or help a threatened family. Conversely, a generous person can act courageously while holding an erroneous interpretation of Romans. The test of obedience does not eliminate the work of interpreting. It denies that interpretation is complete when it has only rearranged propositions. I need the intellectual labor because a wrong doctrine may deform political action; I need the moral demand because a right doctrine can become another way to enjoy being right.

The Didache offers a way to hold those tasks together. It warns a community against a teacher whose conduct contradicts his speech. It also orders common prayer, a table, local ministry, and watchfulness that no solitary moralist can maintain by making a private decision once. I want a congregation to be able to say a public figure's argument about a verse has merit, while declining to copy his prejudices. I want it to distinguish a historian's evidence from a theologian's inference and a political advocate's demand. This is harder than receiving a page of "seven answers" as a replacement for seven footnotes. It is the kind of reading that might change the church rather than merely its authorized commentary.

At the end of Part III I return to the word "promise." A promise reveals something about the one who makes it. The Christian Scriptures say that God is faithful, merciful, and just. If we defend divine fidelity by making mercy and justice disappear from our treatment of others, we have defended a smaller god than the one the prophets knew. Sizer has helped me see the danger in a reading that makes national privilege absolute. Bock has reminded me that a Christian critic can too easily speak as though particular Jewish history has been absorbed without remainder. Tolstoy insists that a conclusion must become conduct, while the Didache keeps that conduct joined to a worshiping and expectant people. I take these demands into the churches I knew. There the interpretation printed under a verse became a sermon, a feeling, and sometimes a public choice. The argument must now follow people and institutions, not merely passages.

Part IV: The Churches and the Land

Chapter 19: They Wanted Revival

In the composite memory, the folding chairs are already in rows when I arrive. Someone has put a pitcher of water on the table near the pulpit. The paper bulletin promises several evenings of revival services, and the word has the pleasant urgency of a forecast. We expect something to happen. We have invited people, prepared music, and made room in our schedules. There is no deception in that hope. A church that no longer expects God to act may have lost something central to its faith.

I spent twenty years in Pentecostal churches, and my last church was in the Holiness movement. That history does not give me authority to speak for every congregation in either tradition. It does mean I cannot treat the longing for revival as a sociological curiosity. I remember the appeal of a room attentive to one another, the relief of saying a hard thing aloud in prayer, the sound of people singing together after a week in which each had been alone with a different burden. It would be dishonest to erase the good in order to make a point about the bad.

When I question what we called revival, I mean to ask about its object and its fruit. Were we seeking the presence of God or the repetition of a recognizable religious experience? A week could be judged successful because the room filled, because the singing gained power, or because someone knelt at the front. Those are observations. They do not disclose whether a conscience became more receptive to a neighbor's pain or a mind more willing to correct a cherished mistake. The measures that come easily to hand are seldom the measures that matter most.

An evangelist might speak about returning to the Lord, and a person could sincerely respond. I would not claim to know what passed between that person and God. Yet the congregation's shared account of the event was shaped by what could be seen. Tears could be noticed; a quiet decision to read a difficult history might not. The raised hand received a glance of encouragement; the member asking why a promised land was being discussed as if its present inhabitants had disappeared might receive no comparable welcome. Our attention selected its evidence.

In Scripture, renewal cannot be detached so easily from justice. The prophets do not condemn worship because worship is inherently shallow. They condemn solemn assemblies that become compatible with exploitation. Isaiah's challenge to a chosen fast turns toward loosening bonds, sharing bread, and sheltering the poor. Amos refuses to let music substitute for righteousness. The test is not whether a congregation can make a service emotionally flat enough to prove seriousness. The test is whether devotion makes the worshipers more truthful and more accountable to other people.

Pentecost itself offers another test. In Acts 2, the Spirit does not create a private pleasure reserved for those already inside a room. People from different places hear the mighty acts of God in languages they understand. Peter preaches publicly, and a community forms around teaching, fellowship, shared goods, prayer, and care for those in need. The account is no simple policy program for our century. It nevertheless refuses the idea that the Spirit's work can be measured by excitement alone. A church that invokes Pentecost should be troubled if its experience of power leaves its description of other human beings thin.

The Didache would have given our revival committee a difficult reading assignment. It begins by placing two ways before the hearer and then describes conduct at a level so ordinary that it cannot be mistaken for the atmosphere of a meeting: bless those who curse, refuse revenge, give to one who asks, share with one in need, do not turn away. Its list of the Way of Death includes forms of greed, arrogance, and indifference as

well as acts anyone would readily condemn. It does not allow the hearer to count an uplifted hour as evidence that the community has taken the Way of Life. An old text associated with early Christian instruction asks how people live when the traveling speaker has gone home.

Tolstoy recognized that demand in the text. I agree with his insistence that the teaching of Jesus has to be practiced, and that an institution cannot replace it with ceremony, assent, or patriotic loyalty. I am not required to accept every one of Tolstoy's conclusions about church and sacrament to hear his challenge. If a person in southeast Kansas says that she loves her enemy, the claim has a public test when her government speaks of a distant enemy. The decision may be complicated; love does not supply an instant solution to a hostage crisis or a question of armed defense. But it rules out the pleasure of being released from considering what happens to that enemy's child. That much is plain before we reach the harder dispute.

In another composite version of the room, the committee gathers on a weeknight to decide whether the meetings went well. Someone mentions attendance. Someone else remembers the long line for prayer. A third person speaks warmly about a testimony. I have no reason to disparage any of these reports. Then imagine that a member asks a different question: after our repeated teaching on the Holy Land, can we name a single Palestinian Christian whose account the congregation has read? Silence follows. In a real meeting, someone might answer the question well. Here the silence marks the difference between measuring our own response and asking whether we have made room for another person's witness.

It is possible to ask the harder question without delivering a prosecutorial speech. A person might bring the text of the Didache and read its opening instructions for an hour with the group. What does it mean to turn the other cheek in a community that has just learned of a massacre? What does it mean to give when people are hungry because aid has not reached them? What if the one who asks belongs to a people our teacher has made frightening to us? Some participants will find the questions naïve. Others may suspect that a moral instruction has been transformed into a foreign policy plan. They deserve time to say why. But if we are prepared to spend several nights repeating songs in hope of spiritual fire, an hour spent trying to understand an early Christian command is not beyond us.

The questions are especially sharp because the Didache does not equate love with credulity. Later it tells communities to test a prophet by conduct, to refuse a person who seeks money in God's name, and to discern a true teacher from a false one. A church that longs for a word from God can therefore examine the visitor who brings one. The speaker's confidence, the response of the room, and the size of the offering are not the test. The things he asks us to do, the truth of what he says, and the use he makes of our trust belong in it. Applied to a prophecy conference, the test could unsettle the very person who invited the speaker. That is one reason it might amount to renewal.

I do not want the oldest surviving instruction to become a new set of decorative footnotes. The Didache belongs to a particular early Christian world; it was not written with a television, an American election, or Gaza in view. Its commands still have the power to make us ask what a teaching is for. A text can be accurately dated, translated, and discussed at length without being obeyed. Tolstoy's accusation against his own church had force precisely here: the people who revered Jesus had often learned how to explain away the demands that were clearest in his teaching. I recognize the danger in my church world and in my own ability to write about it.

This matters because the Holy Land entered our services as a theological stage. We spoke of Israel, sometimes with great affection, but often as if the modern state, the people of the biblical narrative, and the objects of future prophecy could be exchanged without explanation. A conflict became a sign. A map became a promise. The sharper our expectation that history was approaching a divine climax, the more a

political question could feel like a test of whether we trusted the Bible. We could ask God for discernment and yet regard ordinary inquiry as a lack of faith.

I do not claim that every Pentecostal or Holiness church learned this from the Scofield Reference Bible. Some would have rejected its details. The transmission of an idea is rarely that tidy. A visiting speaker, a television teacher, a friend with a chart, a pastor shaped by another pastor: each can carry a simplified version of a system. The person at the end of the chain may never see Scofield's name. What survives is a habit of interpreting current events as confirmation of a script and of treating the script's direction as the first fact about the people caught in those events.

There is a difference between hope in God's future and delight in an apparent sign of catastrophe. Most believers I knew would reject any suggestion that they delighted in suffering. I believe them. The problem is subtler. If a war seems to bring the prophetic timetable into focus, it may elicit a thrill of recognition before it elicits a response to the dead. Even when the thrill is followed by prayer, the order of feeling teaches something. We have approached somebody else's emergency as a signal to us.

The composite revival service begins with a chorus about fire. Its repetition makes room for anticipation. The sound is warm; the people are not playing a part. Yet I imagine a question entering the room between verses: if God's fire is among us, what would it illuminate beyond ourselves? The names on a prayer list are particular. Across an ocean, a Palestinian family is harder to picture, especially if every report comes wrapped in an argument over whether the family's suffering counts as a necessary cost of security or a stage of prophecy. We can choose to leave the family indistinct.

It is tempting to say that the churches were simply uneducated. That is too easy and too cruel. A church member can lack formal biblical training and still possess a keen moral imagination. A trained theologian can use learning to excuse a wrong. The deeper difficulty in the rooms I knew was a mismatch between certainty and inquiry. A complicated claim about Abraham's covenant, Israel's present statehood, and America's obligations could be delivered with more confidence than an ordinary claim about a neighbor's medical bill. It was protected by sacred vocabulary from the scrutiny we would apply to much less consequential assertions.

Some of that protection arose from loyalty. We did not want to embarrass a beloved pastor in the middle of a service. We did not want to sound as though we doubted Scripture when we were uncertain about an interpretation. We had learned to be suspicious of arguments we associated with secular hostility to faith. People also fear losing the fellowship that has carried them through grief. A question about a doctrine can feel like a question about the family gathered around it. These pressures do not excuse silence; they explain why asking plainly is a form of courage.

The call for revival could intensify the pressure. To interrupt the flow of an evening with a historical distinction or the voice of a Palestinian Christian sounded, at first, like introducing politics. The established prophetic account did not sound political to those who had inherited it. It sounded biblical. This asymmetry allowed a political preference to occupy the place of neutrality while a challenge to it was treated as a distraction from spiritual life. A church may believe it has put worldly arguments aside precisely when it has absorbed one so thoroughly that it no longer hears it as an argument.

I know a different account of revival is possible within the same traditions. Holiness is not merely an intense service; the word names a life set apart for God. Pentecostal witness need not be confined to an altar; the Spirit can send believers to listen, serve, and speak truth. These possibilities are not gifts from an outsider to a supposedly benighted church. They are demands the church already professes. My criticism begins inside the language of the people I worshiped with, and it also falls on me.

An invitation to repentance can be frighteningly specific. I can confess impatience in a household and receive prayer from a friend; I have named something that can change when I return home. What would it mean for a congregation to confess that it taught a political claim as if it were a verse? Such confession would require revisiting lessons, perhaps correcting something said from the pulpit, and admitting that members who raised the issue had been treated as disloyal. The altar is familiar territory. The correction of a shared account of the world is less familiar. It leaves a record and an obligation.

This is one reason an appeal to unity can become a constraint on revival. A leader may worry that reopening the church's teaching on Israel will divide the people. There may indeed be disagreement, and it should be handled with care. But unity maintained by forbidding a serious question has a hidden fracture already. Some members know they cannot name what they have seen. Others repeat the old sentence without knowing that anyone nearby has difficulty believing it. Their apparent agreement is partly an effect of who is allowed to speak. A truthful unity would be slower and less smooth.

When people prayed for Israel, they might mean many things. One person remembered the Jewish people after centuries of Christian antisemitism. Another expected a future in God's dealings with Israel. Another pictured a modern military state as the instrument of those promises. The same phrase could hold different beliefs and levels of knowledge. It would be unfair to take the most extreme statement in the room as the thought of everyone present. It would be equally unfair to ignore the public teaching that pushed the room toward a government rather than toward the lives of Jews, Palestinians, and others under its power.

The test of our prayers came when concern for safety required a second sentence. Could we pray for Jewish families without giving their government a moral exemption? Could we pray for Palestinians without regarding their existence as an obstacle to a divine title deed? Could we pray for captives, for bereaved parents, for people trying to deliver water, and then ask whether the policy we defended made their lives more precarious? If prayer relieved us from that inquiry, it had become a sedative. If it committed us to it, prayer might begin to resemble the revival we sought.

The language of blessing deserves the same care. Christians were taught to bless Israel. But a blessing can mean asking for a people's safety, justice, and reconciliation; it need not mean affirming whatever a state does. The prophets of Israel loved their people enough to denounce injustice among them. Paul wanted Gentile believers to refuse arrogance toward Jews. Neither example requires a Christian to mute moral judgment. To call a child expendable because one expects a nation to be restored would be an especially strange way to bless a people under the God of Abraham.

Revival meetings end. The last song finishes, and the chairs must be straightened. The evidence of what happened is dispersed into ordinary hours: what members read, how they speak, whom they help, how they vote, what they permit leaders to say on their behalf. A powerful evening may start a change in any of those things. It may also leave them intact. The difficulty is that a congregation can always schedule another meeting. Repetition may protect it from asking why the previous one had so little effect.

I imagine a person leaving the composite service with an old friend. They talk about how good the singing was. The friend's parent has been ill; someone in church arranged a ride to an appointment. The conversation confirms every reason I have loved local congregations. Then a report about Gaza appears on a phone. The friend looks at it and says something quick about the end times, with a trace of reassurance in the voice. In this invented moment, no villain enters. A small moral displacement occurs. A suffering neighbor is converted from someone to consider into something to recognize.

Living in southeast Kansas has taught me how a small community can keep a person from disappearing. Somebody notices an empty place at worship, remembers an operation, or offers a practical favor that

nobody thought to request. That competence is a resource for moral growth. The question is how to extend it when we cannot recognize a voice or check on a household by driving across town. The answer will involve institutions and information, but it begins with resisting the notion that distance turns people into abstractions. A church's local virtues are incomplete if its public language makes distant lives unreal.

If I write as though revival itself caused that displacement, I will have misunderstood it. The feeling is one part of a larger formation. We learned how to read, what to expect from history, which teachers to trust, and which questions to count as spiritually dangerous. Revival culture could reinforce those lessons by giving them music and communal affirmation. It could also challenge them, if repentance reached the assumptions beneath a congregation's opinions. The issue is which possibility we chose to cultivate.

I have heard revival described as awakening. The word suggests a person who begins to see what had been present while the person slept. We were good at describing a soul's need to wake up. We were less prepared to ask whether an entire church had slept through the appeals of people living in the land its members discussed so confidently. The Palestinian Christian was not a theoretical future convert, nor a prop in a biblical map. The witness was already there, speaking as a Christian from the place we called holy.

That witness can be unwelcome because it complicates a meeting's rhythm. It asks us to stay with histories of displacement, borders, occupation, fear, and violence rather than reach quickly for a chorus with a satisfying last line. It also asks a church to listen to the people who bear the consequences of its interpretations. We may disagree with some of their judgments. Listening does not require transferring our conscience to another speaker. It does require granting them the standing we would grant a sister or brother in Christ who spoke about harm done to their own family.

At the end of the composite evening, I can still feel the attraction of the word revival. I will not surrender it to a production schedule or an applause count. If God brings a people back to life, they should grow harder to deceive and easier to move by another's suffering. They should be able to confess an error in a beloved teacher without losing their faith. They should be less afraid of a fact than of having turned away from a person. That is a demanding hope. It asks more of the church than another week of successful services, and more of me than the pleasure of criticizing those services after leaving the room.

Chapter 20: Church Entertainment

The first time I call a service entertainment, the word sounds like an insult. I have to slow down and ask what I mean by it. The singer is not pretending to sing. The person at the altar is not necessarily performing grief. The people who arrange chairs and make coffee receive little applause. Many give time and money because they love one another. A charge against the structure of an experience should not be converted into an accusation that everyone inside it is acting.

In a composite room, someone watches the clock from the back. The music has carried the congregation farther than expected, and the speaker waits for a quiet opening. A familiar testimony begins. We know enough of its arc to anticipate the low point and the rescue. The pacing is effective. A child looks from the stage to the faces of the adults; she learns when people are moved. Nothing in the scene requires dishonesty. Yet the service has a shape, and the shape favors some kinds of experience over others.

Entertainment, as I use the word, is the organized management of attention toward a satisfying feeling. A worship service must organize attention. A hymn has a tune; a sermon has an opening and a close. The mere presence of form is no betrayal. The danger appears when the congregation begins to value intensity for its own sake and to mistake a familiar climax for a reliable sign that truth has been heard. In that arrangement, an uncomfortable fact feels like an interruption. It has poor timing.

The Didache is a useful interruption because its ordinary instructions resist a producer's sense of climax. Pray at stated times. Fast. Confess before gathering. Share food and resources. Discern whether a traveling teacher's conduct fits the lesson. Choose responsible local leaders. None of these tasks produces the swell of a final chorus by itself. Their repetition forms a congregation over time. I picture the music ending, the folding chairs lifted, and a member remembering that she promised to bring food to a family across town. The action has no stage and no audience. In an early church manual, its kind of faithfulness belongs close to worship.

There is a complication here that I welcome. Tolstoy's passion for the moral teaching of Jesus drew him toward the Didache's opening way of life. His critique of institutional religion can make a ceremony look like a device that conceals obedience. But the Didache does not consist only of an opening ethical tract. It contains baptism, fasting, prayer, thanksgiving over the cup and bread, gathering on the Lord's Day, and the selection of ministers. It will not permit me to make a simple division between ethical Christianity and communal worship. The question is how practices such as prayer and a common meal shape people to share rather than provide a satisfying substitute for sharing. A church can answer badly in either direction: by turning ritual into an escape from the neighbor, or by despising the rituals through which neighbors learn to belong to one another.

In a composite planning conversation, a musician explains that the second song needs to follow the first without a pause. I understand the reason. The key is right; the transition invites people who were distracted to join. What if, once in a while, the leader broke the transition? After a reading about a people hungry in Gaza, the room might sit in silence long enough that no one could mistake the reading for a cue to feel appropriately sad and then move on. A leader could invite those who wished to learn more to meet the next evening, with reports and texts at hand. The service would not have solved the hunger. It would have established that the words were allowed to make a claim on the schedule.

Such a change is harder than replacing one song. The usual sequence has a quiet social contract. A person may weep at the altar, but an unresolved political question can make friends uncomfortable with one another. A member who does not have the money for a trip to Israel may wonder why funds are raised for a

tour when a relief agency is asking for supplies. Another member may fear that criticism of state policy will become a license for antisemitism. Both questions require handling in daylight. A producer's solution is to avoid them in the name of a unified experience. A pastor's harder work is to keep the people at one table while they speak accurately about what they fear.

No church can consider every tragedy each Sunday. Limited attention is part of being human. The moral choice lies in what a community repeatedly makes easy to notice and what it repeatedly makes easy to dismiss. A testimony of healing may find a place because it rises toward victory. A Palestinian Christian describing displacement may receive a moment of sympathy but no place in the story's expected ending. A question about the civilian effects of a military policy refuses the neatness of a chorus. It does not end when the music resolves.

There is a reason the room prefers the clear ending. People arrive exhausted. They have jobs, illnesses, damaged marriages, children in trouble, and bills. A gathering can give them strength for another week. I do not begrudge that gift. I do ask whether the gift must be purchased by narrowing reality. If consolation requires a believer to keep distant suffering out of focus, the cost falls most heavily on the distant person. A church can restore the weary while still teaching them to recognize a human claim that will remain difficult on Monday.

A person organizing a service faces choices that never appear on the bulletin. How long can silence last before it feels like a mistake? How much disagreement can a sermon acknowledge before the congregation wonders whether the speaker believes anything? Is a visitor welcome to speak if the visitor's account leaves people troubled afterward? These choices are not reducible to bad intentions. They arise from the desire to care for a room and bring it together. Yet they can train the room to demand that every story be resolved before the closing prayer, a demand the world cannot satisfy without falsification.

The word “entertainment” also catches my own habits as a listener. I could listen for the sensation that I had attended something important and reward the person who produced it. I might prefer a confident conclusion to a patient distinction because it let me leave with an answer I could repeat. A congregation and its teachers form each other. If the teachers learn that qualifications make us restless, they may speak with fewer qualifications. If we learn that the best service is the one from which no difficulty follows us home, we may mistake a carefully designed exit for a revelation.

The gospel narratives refuse to provide unbroken emotional satisfaction. Jesus heals and feeds, but he also asks questions that frustrate his hearers' desire for an easy triumph. A disciple can speak with devotion and then be rebuked. A crowd can praise and misunderstand. The passion narrative does not hurry past a public execution to protect the audience's mood. Its final hope is inseparable from its refusal to pretend that the violence did not happen. If the church's program cannot bear a prolonged moment of lament, its form may be teaching a smaller gospel than its words proclaim.

I remember how a predictable emotional arc can feel like safety. The soft beginning makes room for personal troubles; the songs rise; a leader calls us forward; people pray; afterward there is relief. The arc can be hospitable to a person who has no other language for a need. It can also become a substitute for examining the teaching spoken between the songs. The doctrine arrives while defenses are lowered, already joined to cherished sounds and trusted faces. In the case of the Holy Land, a political judgment could be presented in that atmosphere as the ordinary posture of faith.

The same happens outside the sanctuary. Christian media can package a new event as a dramatic confirmation of an old prediction. A headline, a map, and a verse may be enough to produce recognition. There is a small pleasure in being among those who know what the event means. The pleasure does not

prove the meaning is wrong. It should, however, make us cautious. A person who enjoys the explanatory power of a prophecy chart may be reluctant to attend to evidence that makes the chart's application uncertain or its political consequence painful.

The screen changes the speed of the encounter. A speaker with a remote can move from an ancient place name to a contemporary image and a headline in seconds. If the two resemble one another, the visual connection can feel like an argument. The work that would make it an argument remains to be done: establish the date and meaning of the ancient text, identify the relevant historical continuities and breaks, check the source of the image, and explain why one proposed present-day application is stronger than another. The room may have experienced the conclusion before those steps have begun. A pause can feel like doubt, though it may be the first act of fidelity to the text.

I am not claiming that modern worship caused Christian Zionism or that every church with a screen and instruments supports a particular policy. Those claims would be absurdly broad. The issue is an affinity between two habits. One habit rewards the immediate, repeatable feeling that a service is going somewhere. The other rewards the immediate, repeatable conclusion that history is going where we said it would. Together they can make a morally complicated event feel settled before anyone has heard from the people involved.

What would a less entertaining treatment of the Holy Land require? First, time. A passage about Abraham would be read in its setting and alongside its New Testament reception, including texts that trouble the first interpretation we reach. A historical account would distinguish ancient Israel, Jewish people in the modern world, Zionist movements, the State of Israel, and the Palestinians who live in the land. A report of violence would name the attacked and the bereaved without assigning unequal value to their lives. These are acts of attention, not spectacles. They may be quiet enough to feel anticlimactic.

Second, it would require a congregation to live with uncertainty where uncertainty exists. We can have a firm moral obligation to protect civilians without knowing every fact in a contested incident. We can condemn the murder and abduction of Israeli civilians and oppose the destruction of Palestinian civilian life without pretending to have solved every legal dispute about war. We can distinguish a person's right to safety from a government's claim to a policy that threatens someone else's safety. None of this supplies an applause line. It does supply a usable conscience.

Third, it would require the leaders who shape a meeting to welcome correction. A pastor who has taught a familiar sentence about Israel may feel that a question about it threatens the pastor's integrity. A better response is possible: show me the text, show me the history, let us ask whom the sentence leaves out. That is a form of pastoral care, although it does not always feel like one in the moment. The congregants who learn to ask responsibly are less likely to need another confident voice to think for them.

An imagined conversation after a service catches the problem in miniature. A member says she saw a report from a Palestinian hospital and asks whether the church can investigate a relief effort. Another replies that the media cannot be trusted. That caution is understandable; reports in war deserve verification. But if distrust becomes a universal answer to evidence of harm on only one side, it is no longer caution. It is an exemption from seeing. The sound of concern remains in the voice while the matter is closed.

I have also seen the opposite danger in political argument: a person finds one appalling image, stops asking anything about its circumstances, and shares it because it confirms a prior judgment. A church that abandons its prophecy chart for an equally automatic counterstory has not learned the lesson. Human beings deserve the labor of checking claims. Truthful solidarity is slower than the arrival of a feeling. Its slowness is part of its respect.

The checking is a spiritual discipline precisely because it frustrates the parts of us that want to be vindicated. It may require me to retract a striking story I had hoped was true. It may require me to listen to a witness whose politics I dislike. It may also require a church member who has been careful about a false image of one atrocity to give the same attention to a documented account of another. The goal is neither an impossible total knowledge nor a refusal to judge until history ends. It is to make the best judgment possible while remaining answerable to new evidence.

The entertainment habit can diminish Scripture itself. A verse is placed on a screen because it provides an emotional cue, detached from the paragraphs that complicate its use. The congregation learns the cue more effectively than the argument. The book of Revelation offers images fit for a dramatic montage; it also calls the churches to patient endurance, fidelity, and discernment in the face of power. The prophets provide warnings that can be projected over a map; they also arraign their own people for oppression. If we select only the parts that make the room surge, the Bible becomes a supplier of effects.

There is no need to remove beauty in order to resist that temptation. The best song may open a person to grief as well as comfort. Silence can be part of worship. Testimony can include an unresolved wrong rather than race toward a lesson. A church could hear a Christian from Bethlehem or Gaza speak in that person's own words, then leave enough space for questions that cannot be answered by a single verse. The aim is not to make services dreary. It is to keep the beauty from being made responsible for evasion.

The oldest text does not ask us to abandon expectation. Its last chapter urges watchfulness for the Lord's coming. What surprises me is the placement of that watchfulness after pages of instruction about daily conduct and common life. The coming is neither a cue to stop sharing bread nor a prize for recognizing the right current event. The warning against false teachers stands nearby. This sequence will not by itself settle the interpretation of Revelation or the order of the last things, but it puts the weight of expectation in a different place. We are asked to keep our lamps ready through the life we lead. A production that teaches an audience to recognize catastrophe on a screen may never teach the audience how to be ready for a hungry person at the door.

There is a practical way to assess a service afterward. Ask what happened during the week because of what was heard. Were any members moved to check a claim they had passed along? Did they visit a lonely neighbor? Did they read the full statement of a church in Bethlehem rather than an excerpt chosen for impact? Did they learn to disagree about a war without threatening a person's standing in the congregation? An answer may be small and inconclusive. It is still better evidence of formation than a count of how many people said the final song moved them. The two measures need not be enemies; they need to be kept in the right order.

One of the claims of this book is that private grace and public blindness can inhabit the same people. Entertainment helps the coexistence remain comfortable. We are given many opportunities to demonstrate local kindness, which is real and visible. Our distant political judgments arrive wrapped in group language and consequence at a distance. When the local kindness makes us feel that we must be morally reliable in every setting, we stop testing those judgments. The church's good works then become an unintended shield for its unexamined teaching.

This is why I resist the easy charge of hypocrisy. A person may not consciously keep two standards. The processes of attention operate at different scales. If a neighbor is sick, a church member brings soup and sits with the family. If thousands of strangers are endangered, the same member reaches for a national story, a military rationale, or an end-times explanation. A face on the first street receives care; a category

on the far side of the world receives a principle. The distance does not make the member wicked. It makes the need for disciplined imagination more urgent.

Public advocacy is one way the distance narrows. A congregation may support a lobbying campaign, contact an official, fund an organization, or teach children what stance a faithful Christian should take. At that point an interpretation has left the realm of private consolation. It has entered decisions with material consequences. It is right to ask what evidence the organization gives, what policy it asks for, and how that policy treats all the people in the land. The seriousness of political participation should be at least as great as the confidence with which an invitation is issued from the stage.

I do not think every worship leader ought to become a foreign-policy analyst. I do think a church that makes foreign policy a matter of biblical obedience has accepted a duty to examine it. The appeal to sacred authority makes the duty heavier, because dissenters may be told that disagreement is rebellion against God. When a policy is presented as an expression of faith, its earthly effects cannot be sealed off as someone else's specialty. A minister can bring experts and witnesses into the conversation, acknowledge limits, and decline to issue a command that Scripture has not made plain.

In the composite service, the final chord hangs for a second before people speak. Someone thanks the musicians. Another asks about a person who has missed two Sundays. Those moments are part of a church worth saving. I want a future in which the room can hold an equally ordinary question about a family in Gaza, where that question does not count as an attempt to spoil the evening. A congregation has not failed because it cannot solve a war. It has failed one small test when it cannot bear to hear of the war without converting the testimony into a familiar signal.

There would be costs to changing the format. Some members might come less often if worship no longer guarantees release from the week's strain. A leader might receive complaints for bringing an unresolved moral problem into prayer. That cost should be named. Churches have limited resources and vulnerable people to tend. But avoiding a subject to protect a crowded room carries another cost, borne by those affected by the church's public conclusions. The question is not whether worship will be comfortable. It is for whose comfort the account of the world has been arranged.

Entertainment ends when the audience leaves. Worship, if it is worship, follows us into what we believe and do. It can turn a person toward a hard responsibility that yields no immediate pleasure and no neat conclusion. The church that chooses such attention might still sing with great feeling. It would simply refuse to let the feeling decide in advance whose cries can be heard.

Chapter 21: The “Jesus Face”

I use the phrase “Jesus face” for an expression I came to recognize in the church world I knew: a gentle look and a gentle voice appearing just as a difficult question threatens a settled belief. It is a composite observation and my name for a pattern, not a diagnosis of a particular person's motives. Faces can deceive an observer. A person may be overwhelmed, unprepared, or genuinely trying to be kind. I have worn something like the expression myself. Its importance is what it can do to a conversation, even when the person wearing it means no harm.

Imagine a hallway after worship. People are balancing coats, cups, and the practical concerns of lunch. I ask about a claim in a sermon: why should God's promise to Abraham be treated as unconditional approval of a modern government's actions? The other person's eyebrows draw together with concern. The voice softens. “Let's just pray for peace,” the person says. In the imagined exchange, the sentence is sincere. It also allows us both to pass through the doorway without answering the question. Our bodies are relieved before our minds notice what happened.

Prayer for peace is no small thing. I have asked for it myself. The trouble is the little word “just” when it means prayer has displaced inquiry, action, or correction. A person may pray for a sick neighbor and still drive that neighbor to a doctor. Why should a church that prays for a people in danger refuse to ask which policies expose them to danger? The choice between prayer and moral analysis is one we made. The New Testament does not require it.

The Didache is unusually exact about the distance between speech and action. In its second chapter, the instruction against being double-tongued stands beside a demand that speech be fulfilled by deed. It also warns against false witness and hypocrisy. These are words for the ordinary hallway, not just the courtroom. A prayer for peace may be honest; it becomes something else if the person praying uses it to end every inquiry about a policy she actively supports. I must be careful with that judgment. A single tired answer in a hallway cannot reveal a person's whole moral life. The question is whether a repeated pattern leaves us with benevolent language and contrary action.

The oldest instruction also makes room for reproof. Its refusal to hate anyone does not forbid all correction; it pairs peace among people with righteous judgment and the confession of transgressions in the gathering. That combination matters when a congregation equates an objection to teaching with an attack on its unity. I could ask what has happened to a biblical claim without wishing the speaker harm. A pastor could receive the question without becoming small. In the Didache's world, belonging to a community does not mean treating every contested sentence as untouchable. The work of reconciliation begins when something can be said.

I imagine a longer version of the hallway exchange. The person who invites prayer tells me about a Jewish relative afraid after October 7. I answer that the fear is not a debating device; it belongs to a person whose safety matters. I describe the fear I hear in a Palestinian Christian's public sermon and ask whether we could read it. We agree to bring two texts, the statement from Bethlehem and the lesson our own church has used about land. Neither of us promises to change our mind. We simply make the conversation returnable. This is an invented exchange, but the act it illustrates is concrete: do not let one sentence of concern become the final sentence of the subject.

In practice the second meeting would be uncomfortable. The inherited lesson may combine Genesis, Romans, and a modern news report. The Bethlehem sermon may charge Western churches with complicity. I would want to defend myself. The other member might feel her love of Jewish people has been called into

question. If we both rush to prove innocence, the texts disappear beneath our self-portraits. We need to distinguish an accusation about a teaching's effects from an accusation that a listener secretly wanted children to die. We can acknowledge the charge, test it, and ask what part of the harm our own statements might have made easier. This is slower than a hallway blessing and less satisfying than an argument won.

The analogy with illness is imperfect, as every analogy is. A congregation may be able to help its neighbor directly and have only a modest influence over a distant war. Yet modest influence is not no influence. Churches teach, fund, petition, vote, and confer moral standing on public campaigns. If a member is urged to call a representative in favor of a particular policy, that member deserves at least as much care in assessing the policy as in choosing a doctor for a friend. A prayer can prepare a person to take that care; it should not make the care seem faithless.

The Jesus face is persuasive because compassion is visible in it. A harsh refusal to discuss civilian suffering might trigger resistance. A soft refusal can feel like the more Christian response. It can calm the person raising the question by offering a moment of interpersonal warmth. If the question returns, however, its bearer may be accused of agitation, bitterness, or division. The group has preserved its image of tenderness while limiting the work tenderness demands.

What happens next is usually ordinary. The questioner tries a less direct approach. Perhaps another article is sent, or a Bible passage is raised in a small group. The response becomes more general: nobody knows everything; social media is full of lies; God loves everyone. Eventually the questioner either repeats the point too loudly or grows quiet. The group can then identify the loudness as the problem, or mistake the quiet for agreement. In this composite sequence, no one has to order a person to be silent. A community's habits can teach silence by making every attempt to speak seem either rude or futile.

There are many reasons people close a hard conversation. Some have watched political disputes fracture a congregation. Some suspect, reasonably, that a provocative claim arriving on a phone has not been verified. Some have a family history that makes the subject frightening. The recent killing of Jewish civilians and the taking of hostages can make a call for Palestinian rights sound, to a fearful listener, like indifference to Jewish safety. That fear deserves to be heard. It does not settle a question about what should happen to Palestinian civilians. A careful conversation must be able to hold both.

The phrase also warns me about my own posture. I can put on a different face, the face of the one who has finally seen through everything, and use it to avoid learning from a believer I consider naive. The pleasure of exposure is another escape from conversation. If I intend to change a church's moral imagination, I must be willing to read its strongest argument, correct my errors, and distinguish the committed advocate of a harmful policy from the person who has inherited a phrase without understanding it. Contempt is a quick way to make myself feel clear while changing nothing.

What I encountered over twenty years was often a thin account of the theology being spoken with confidence. That is my judgment about my experience; it is not a survey of every Pentecostal or Holiness believer. The thinness showed itself when a formula closed a question that a passage of Scripture had opened. What does Paul mean by one olive tree? What does it mean for Gentiles to become heirs in Christ? How do the prophets themselves judge a ruler's conduct? These questions are difficult. A declaration that “the Bible is clear” may mark the start of studying them, but in some rooms it marked the end.

The ordinary conversational formula did much of the work. “God is in control.” “We need to stand with Israel.” “Both sides are suffering.” Each can be true or false depending on what its speaker means and what follows. God being in control does not make every act of a government righteous. Standing with Jewish people against antisemitism does not require supporting a particular military policy. The reality that both

sides suffer does not remove the need to ask who exercises what power and what each has done. A true sentence can become a means of evasion when used to prevent the next true sentence.

I am especially wary of how “both sides” can work. It can be a necessary refusal to deny the humanity of one people. It can also flatten a difference in circumstances so large that the listener loses sight of responsibility. To insist on equal human worth is not to claim that two governments or armed groups have identical capacities, acts, or obligations. Civilians are owed protection on either side. What happened to them and what could have prevented it still require particular accounts. A generalized sigh of sadness does not supply those accounts.

A person who says “both sides” may be reaching for a boundary against the pressure to join a camp. I understand that impulse. Jewish and Palestinian lives have been made into tests of loyalty in many conversations. We need a language capacious enough to condemn the murder of Israeli civilians, demand the release of captives, oppose indiscriminate harm to Palestinians, and ask about state responsibility without treating any clause as a cancellation of another. The language has to move beyond a formula into sentences about what each actor did, what duty applied, and what remedy is being sought. Otherwise the moral symmetry of the phrase conceals the political asymmetry of the case.

The Jesus face can appear at a larger scale in institutional language. A statement expresses grief for everyone and offers no examination of a policy the institution has publicly supported. A pastor invites prayer while treating a call for a ceasefire as an attack on the faith. An organization uses the language of peace while lobbying for actions that its critics believe prolong civilian danger. In each case the content must be checked; a facial expression alone proves nothing. The pattern to watch is a claim to compassionate neutrality paired with a refusal to take responsibility for the institution's own influence.

We need fair tests. Does the speaker acknowledge concrete civilian losses on each side? Does the speaker separate an ancient people from a current government? When presented with a corrected fact, does the speaker correct a sermon or repeat it? Does prayer lead to care, inquiry, and accountability, or mark the end of them? Does the congregation invite voices from the region, including people who challenge its usual teaching? These are better questions than whether someone looks sincere. Many people look sincere, because they are.

A composite conversation at a fellowship table helps me see the difference. Someone says, “I don't know enough about this to speak.” That sentence can be an honest beginning. The person asks for a book, wants to hear how Palestinian Christians read Scripture, and plans to check a claim before sharing it. The same sentence can be a permanent shelter if its speaker then endorses one side's policy with absolute certainty whenever an election arrives. A confession of limited knowledge becomes meaningful when it changes the confidence of one's advocacy.

There is also the person who knows a great deal about one layer of the question. A member may recite Hebrew terms, the dates of biblical kings, and the sequence of expected prophetic events, then know almost nothing about the laws governing civilian protection or the account a present-day Palestinian family gives of its home. Expertise in one layer can produce confidence that spills into another. I know this temptation as a scientist. Knowing how to evaluate one kind of evidence can make me feel more competent with another than I am. An honest church must learn to mark the boundary of its expertise before the boundary is drawn for it by a preventable error.

I sometimes wonder whether our preferred language of testimony made us reluctant to examine this asymmetry. We were accustomed to a person telling what God had done for that person, and we did not cross-examine an account of grace. That restraint can protect vulnerable people. But a claim about the

ownership of land, the legitimacy of occupation, or the wisdom of sending arms is not a private account of grace. It is a public proposition that affects others. It needs questions. Respecting a testimony does not mean treating every later political inference as immune from evidence.

The New Testament's picture of gentleness offers no warrant for intellectual retreat. Jesus' encounters are often tender and uncomfortably exact at once. He can notice a person in a crowd and ask an unwelcome question of those with authority. Paul can urge humility and also confront Peter over a practice that excluded Gentile believers. The apostolic call to speak truth in love does not permit us to use love as a way to avoid the truth. Nor does it permit truth to become an excuse to humiliate the person across the table.

For a church formed by the holiness tradition, the phrase “be holy” should reach the habits by which it handles evidence. We may be scrupulous about private conduct and surprisingly casual about a claim that justifies public violence. We can pray over our speech, then repeat a slogan without asking who benefits when the slogan replaces a history. Holiness is a demanding word if it includes the tongue, the imagination, the ballot, and the way we read a frightened stranger's letter.

For a Pentecostal church, discernment should mean more than recognizing an atmosphere in a room. It should include the capacity to test the interpretation that atmosphere carries. A fervent sermon may be mistaken. A hesitant question may be faithful. If we believe the Spirit can correct us, we cannot make the most confident voice at the microphone the final authority simply because the congregation felt moved. The possibility of being corrected is not a threat to spiritual life; it is one of the ways life continues.

Correction has a social form. A member who has challenged a teaching should not be required to perform perfect politeness before the challenge is considered. A pastor who has made an error should have a way to say so without being treated as a fraud. A congregation should know where to find the sources behind a claim that has political consequences. None of this guarantees consensus. It makes disagreement less dependent on rank, tone, or the ability to hold a room's emotions. It gives the quiet believer a place to stand and the confident believer a way to reconsider.

This is one point at which Tolstoy's severity can help and also needs care. His refusal to let ecclesiastical authority excuse disobedience presses through a leader's gentle tone to the public act that follows. Yet his suspicion of the institutional church can tempt a reader to imagine that leaving the room is itself moral clarity. I cannot assume that. I learned habits in churches, and I also learned how members held one another through ordinary grief. If the Jesus face prevents a question, the remedy is a church that can hear it and change. A person may eventually have to leave a particular community. The goal is not merely to find a morally satisfying exit for the critic while the teaching continues behind the door.

There is a smaller discipline in listening to the person who does not yet know what to say. If I demand an immediate declaration about genocide, ceasefire terms, or the proper reading of Romans 11, I may reproduce the quick certainty I deplore. I can ask instead for a next step: read a testimony, examine the wording of a policy request, ask whether the verse invoked says what the speaker said it says. The step is modest only in scale. It changes the relation between a believer and an inherited formula. A person who learns to return to a hard question may be less likely to borrow a face of assurance to make that question disappear.

The quiet believer matters because apparent consensus can be manufactured without anyone intending to manufacture it. Each person may assume the others agree with the loudest speaker, and each may decide that the cost of dissent is too high for an ordinary Sunday. Over time the absence of objections is cited as evidence that the teaching is settled. One member's private doubt never becomes another member's permission to ask. I cannot measure how often this happened in the churches I knew. I can describe the

mechanism and confess that I, too, have sometimes accepted silence as agreement when it was merely silence.

The problem is acute in arguments about Gaza because an image can overwhelm and a formula can numb. I want neither. I have called the destruction genocide, a judgment I will examine elsewhere in this book. A reader who disputes that term can still ask whether the lives and homes of civilians were treated as expendable. A reader who agrees with me should still check particulars. The Jesus face may try to end the exchange before those questions are asked; outrage can end it in another way by assuming every question is bad faith. Both responses spare us the discipline of sustained attention.

I return in imagination to the hallway. I could answer the gentle invitation to pray by saying yes. Then I could add, quietly, that I want to understand the policy we are being urged to support. I could ask to read the passage together, look at the claim's history, and hear a Christian who lives there. The other person might refuse. More likely, our calendars and fears would make the task awkward. It would be easier to agree that we care and go home. The moral difference begins in whether we arrange a time to return to the question.

Perhaps the conversation eventually exposes a real disagreement about Scripture. That would be progress. The other person might believe that God's covenant requires a distinctive future for national Israel, while I argue that Christian readings of the promise must pass through Christ and the reconciled people described in the New Testament. We could read and argue without pretending to settle everything in an hour. We could also agree that neither reading authorizes cruelty toward a child. The work of interpretation continues; protection of the child's life need not wait for unanimity about eschatology.

The Jesus face is finally a warning about the use of Christianity's most intimate symbol. The face of Jesus in the Gospels is turned toward actual people. If I borrow his name to make my own face appear compassionate while shielding a settled preference from challenge, I have reversed the direction of attention. The sign that I want to look like him is less important than whether I see whom he would have me see. That question will lead us from an American room into the voices of Christians who were already at home in the land we imagined from afar.

Chapter 22: The Christians Made Invisible

There are Christians in Gaza. There are Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and towns and villages throughout the land. It is startling that this needs to be said in a book addressed to Christians who care intensely about the place where Jesus lived. A believer can know every location on a pilgrimage map and still fail to imagine a contemporary parish, a family carrying groceries home, or a pastor worrying about a person who has missed worship. The omission is more than a gap in travel knowledge. It reveals whose present life the map was made to show.

I could invent a Palestinian Christian character and let that person deliver a moving speech. I will not. The church communities of the region have spoken publicly in their own words, and their statements are available to readers who wish to hear them. The composite first-person scenes in this book concern my own American church experience. This chapter owes a different kind of care to people whose lives I have not lived. Their witness can challenge my argument as well as support it.

One place to begin is the 2009 Kairos Palestine document, a statement developed by Palestinian Christians and supported in its opening pages by the patriarchs and heads of churches in Jerusalem. Its authors speak from within Christian faith and Palestinian belonging. They describe occupation, restrictions on movement, separation of families, settlement, and the situation in Gaza as they understood them then. Their appeal is theological as well as political: they ask the churches of the world to revisit interpretations that offer religious cover to injustice. They address the Bible directly, insisting that it must be good news for all rather than a weapon against some.

The document predates the war that began in October 2023. That matters. Palestinian Christians were not created as a rhetorical answer to recent headlines. They had long been asking other churches to see what those churches' accounts of the Holy Land left out. The document calls readers to “come and see,” a brief phrase worth obeying beyond tourism. It means attending to the persons whose homes, churches, jobs, schools, and freedom of worship are at issue. It also means listening carefully enough to notice that Palestinian Christians are diverse and are not the sole representatives of all Palestinians.

The word “Kairos” names an urgent moment, but the document's urgency did not erase its long view. Its authors placed present injustices beside their account of a God who loves every person and beside the hope that Palestinians and Israelis might live together in justice. A reader may contest their analysis of the means to that end. The text is nevertheless striking for the way it refuses a theology in which one people's existence requires the other people's disappearance. In an American argument that often treats any Palestinian demand as a threat to Israel and any Jewish fear as a pretext, that insistence on a shared future deserves careful attention.

An American evangelical might object to the Kairos document's politics, its reading of particular texts, or its support for nonviolent boycott. The authors do not require a reader to agree with every proposal before they can be heard. They do require a reply that recognizes them as Christian speakers with knowledge of their own circumstances. The easy dismissal that they are merely parroting secular politics overlooks how explicitly they reason from Scripture, Jesus Christ, the image of God, and the demands of faith, hope, and love. A theological disagreement should be conducted as a theological disagreement, with their arguments on the table.

One voice was heard from Bethlehem in December 2023. The Rev. Munther Isaac, pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church, preached beside a nativity scene that placed the infant among rubble. His sermon challenged Western churches that gave theological cover to violence and interpreted the

incarnation as God’s solidarity with people made vulnerable by it. He called the destruction in Gaza genocide and demanded a ceasefire. A reader may dispute his legal description or his account of responsibility, but a Christian cannot honestly say that no fellow believer in the land has explained the stakes of Western preaching. Isaac was not a symbol placed on a prophecy map by someone elsewhere. He was a pastor reading the Christmas story aloud to his own community and to the churches that claimed to love Bethlehem.

The sermon is more difficult to hear if I receive it as a direct address rather than an illustration of my argument. It asks Western churches what their theology has done and whose life it has helped them discount. I could reply that I did not make the decisions he condemns, that an American congregation has little control over military strategy, or that October 7 produced fears a Bethlehem preacher may not fully share. Those replies contain questions worth discussing. They can also become ways of completing my own defense before the preacher's question has entered. His words deserve to be read in sequence, in their liturgical setting of Christmas lament, with attention to what he actually charges and what he asks his hearers to do.

When I say that he called the destruction genocide, I am describing his public sermon. He did not need to await a court's final judgment before preaching to a grieving community. A reader who disputes the term owes him an argument, and the legal question has its own exact requirements. Neither fact allows a distant believer to file the sermon under “political controversy” and return to a Christmas pageant in which Bethlehem has no residents. The manger he set among rubble deliberately denied the safe distance between the nativity celebrated in America and the people of the region now. One can disagree with his application and still be compelled to answer it.

The Didache describes a community receiving a traveling teacher and then discerning the teacher's doctrine and conduct. The ancient rules are not a modern protocol for a video call; the text itself even warns against a person who exploits hospitality. But the order is worth noticing: receive the person, hear the teaching, and exercise judgment. We have sometimes inverted it when a Palestinian Christian appeared. We classified the voice as political and thus foreign to the fellowship before hearing the account. Meanwhile an American speaker who linked Scripture to present borders was called biblical before the policy implication was examined. Hospitality that welcomes only a familiar conclusion has turned discernment into a gate.

Receiving a witness does not require immunity from examination. A pastor can ask what source supports a casualty claim, what public policy is being proposed, and how a biblical passage is being read. Isaac himself is a theologian, not simply a victim invited to supply feeling. He can be engaged with respect for the argument. I would ask equally precise questions of a visitor who supports military aid or opposes a ceasefire. If the congregation hears both, the facts and reasons offered by each should be subjected to comparable scrutiny. This is a demanding form of hospitality because it gives no speaker, including a speaker I agree with, the free use of a microphone to replace evidence.

The Kairos Palestine document contains a warning that reaches directly into the subject of this book. It objects to using the Bible to legitimate political options based on injustice imposed by one person or people upon another. I need not claim that every detail of the document is correct to recognize the seriousness of that challenge. Christians who regard Scripture as an authority must consider whether their own use of Scripture has made a neighbor's life less visible. A text cannot be honored by placing it above a person as a shield against seeing the person.

The Kairos authors also condemn antisemitism and Islamophobia. That position is often lost when American debate forces every intervention into two hostile camps. Their criticism of occupation is not a

permission slip to blame Jews as a people for a state's acts. Nor does the Christian identity of a Palestinian give that person's life more value than a Muslim neighbor's. The point of seeing Palestinian Christians is not to establish that the people of Gaza become worthy of protection only when we discover a church among them. It is to expose the strange failure of a Christian movement that says it loves the Holy Land while overlooking some of its own living churches.

The churches of Gaza made that failure impossible to defend as a simple lack of information. The Greek Orthodox church of Saint Porphyrius and the Catholic Holy Family parish became places of refuge in the war. The al-Ahli Anglican Hospital cared for patients in extraordinary danger. In an August 2024 appeal, the patriarchs and heads of the churches in Jerusalem named those communities and called for a ceasefire, the release of captives, the return of displaced people, treatment of the wounded, food and water, rebuilding, and a just peace. Their sequence is pastorally concrete. It begins with people who need to live.

It would be a mistake to hear this as a plea to save only the churches. The compounds sheltered people because a community in danger needed shelter, and the hospital's purpose was care for the sick and wounded. A Christian response to the attack on a church cannot stop at dismay that a Christian building was struck while remaining unmoved by the destruction of Muslim homes or a secular school. If the sight of a church finally makes Gaza real to a distant believer, the sight should open the believer's attention to everyone nearby. Shared faith can be a doorway into a wider obligation, not a boundary around it.

The Latin Patriarchate reported in December 2023 that two Christian women were killed in its Holy Family parish compound. Its account names a place of worship and refuge, and the women were not symbols in an argument about the identity of the land. The claim about the circumstances of their deaths was made by the patriarchate and should be reported as such. The irreducible fact for a church abroad is that living Christian communities were seeking shelter amid the same devastation as their Muslim neighbors. Their danger did not begin or end at the threshold of the church compound.

The patriarchate named the women as Nahida and her daughter Samar. To repeat their names is not to claim that I know them or can narrate their last thoughts. It is to refuse the ease with which a casualty becomes a unit in a dispute about whether a report was politically useful. The patriarchate's public account can be examined as an account; the people in it should not have to vanish while that examination takes place. Their family and church experienced a loss that no later argument about prophetic geography can undo.

In July 2025 the Holy Family compound was struck again, and the Latin Patriarchate reported three dead and others wounded, including the parish priest with light injuries. One should take care with changing casualty figures in breaking statements and with accounts of military responsibility. The later statement of the patriarchs and heads of churches attributed the strike to the Israeli army and joined the families in grief. These details do not require treating one church building as the whole of Gaza's suffering. They make plain that the church visible to American Christians at Christmas existed as a vulnerable community on an actual street.

Some Christians responded with public solidarity. The World Council of Churches called for a ceasefire, humanitarian access, release of hostages and people detained without due process, protection of civilians, and accountability for violations committed by all parties. Its executive committee specifically urged member churches to address forms of Christian Zionism that absolve the State of Israel of legal and moral responsibilities. It is therefore false to speak as if “the church” had only one response. The question for my argument is which voices American congregations chose to hear and what they did when the voices disagreed.

There is a temptation to use the Palestinian Christian as an ideal witness whose presence settles every dispute. That would repeat the instrumental use of people this book opposes. A Christian in Gaza may speak with anger, fear, hope, disagreement, exhaustion, or all of them. The right to be heard does not depend on producing a statement perfectly suited to an American book's thesis. Likewise, Jewish Israelis and Jewish communities beyond Israel have varied convictions and experiences of threat. We should stop asking a person to represent an entire category before granting that the person's account matters.

The invisibility I am describing arises from a way of telling biblical history. In one common account, the land is first an ancient promise and next a modern sign. The long centuries between those moments blur. The Christians who have worshiped in the region across those centuries become decorative remnants in a photograph of an old church, while their descendants' political claims are treated as interruptions of the prophecy narrative. This is poor history and a poor way to honor a place. A holy site remains part of a neighborhood. A liturgy has worshipers who must be able to reach the church.

An early Christian meal provides a different image of geography. The Didache thanks God for bread gathered from what was scattered over the hills, and it prays that the church may be gathered. There is an image of people joined across distance, though the meal is not a modern political treaty and the ancient community has its own boundaries. At a table in Kansas, I cannot use that prayer to pretend the distance to Gaza has disappeared. I can ask whether the table teaches me to think of a believer there as part of a living fellowship rather than a figure in the next chapter of someone else's national story. If I cannot even name the church from which a fellow believer has written, “the church gathered” has become an idea too thin for a shared meal.

I am wary of claiming that the Didache directly speaks for the churches now in Palestine. The anonymous early text traveled through a changing Christian world. Its ancient community was not a modern national constituency, and Palestinian Christians have their own histories and institutions. The connection I draw is an ethical test for my reading, not a pedigree assigned to people without asking them. The person in Bethlehem is entitled to speak as a contemporary Christian even if the precise lines of historical continuity to the first readers of the Didache cannot be traced. A living witness does not require my certificate of antiquity.

Even a believer who is interested primarily in Jewish history should find this flattening unsatisfactory. Jewish presence and Jewish longing have their own continuities, ruptures, diasporas, and returns. They should not be made into a single unchanging prop either. Modern nationalism, religious identity, immigration, and state power are distinct matters even when they intersect. The discipline of seeing Palestinian Christians belongs to a larger discipline of refusing to let any living people disappear behind a symbolic role. It asks the American reader to acquire historical patience rather than exchange one slogan for another.

Christian pilgrimage could correct the blur or reinforce it. A visitor may stand in Bethlehem and leave with photographs of stones but no account of the Christians who maintain the church, teach children, or seek permission to travel. The 2009 invitation to come and see asks for more than a tour. It asks the pilgrim to hear from Palestinians and Israelis about the conditions under which they live. A responsible visit does not require a visitor to surrender judgment to one guide. It requires the visitor not to mistake proximity to ancient ruins for familiarity with current people.

For the congregations I knew, the most likely encounter was not a trip but a sermon, video, or visiting speaker. Who was given a microphone? A teacher from abroad could describe Israel's strategic and biblical importance; a Palestinian Christian might never be invited to explain a checkpoint, a separated family, or

the meaning of hope in a place under occupation. Even when a speaker mentioned Christians in the region, the mention might be brief before the expected prophecy scheme returned. Repetition did the rest. The familiar voice became the voice of the land; the people who lived there were reduced to background.

The New Testament gives a church good reasons to resist that reduction. Paul collected aid from Gentile congregations for believers in Jerusalem; their material circumstances mattered to churches far away. The image of one body makes distant members a matter of responsibility, not curiosity. The story of the Samaritan turns attention from the correct definition of a neighbor to the wounded person on the road and the cost of stopping. These texts do not dictate an exact territorial settlement. They do forbid a Christian to use uncertainty about a settlement as an excuse to pass by a body.

Some will say that the earliest churches in the region cannot simply be identified with today's Palestinian Christians across all the intervening migrations, conversions, and changes of language. That is right as a caution against a romantic, unbroken genealogy. It is no reason to deny today's communities their present history, worship, and claims. They need not prove pure ancient ancestry to be Christians living in the places at issue. Nor should modern Jewish communities have to prove such purity to merit safety and belonging. Rights and moral attention are not prizes for winning a contest of pedigrees.

The question sharpens when a Christian Zionist says that God has given the land to one people. Even granting an interpretation that expects a future national restoration, the interpreter must still decide what may be done to those who live there now. A promise read from Scripture does not by itself answer a question about homes, children, hospitals, legal equality, or the means used to secure borders. Many theologians who affirm a future for Israel reject a moral blank check for a government. A church that skips that step has turned a contested theological claim into a permission structure.

The Palestinian Christian voice can also unsettle my own rhetoric. If I speak only of complicity and judgment, I might drown out the persistence of communities organizing aid, worship, and education under pressure. The Kairos text calls itself a word of faith, hope, and love despite its account of suffering. The patriarchs and heads of churches call for the return of captives and for a peace in which both peoples can live. Their witness need not be reduced to victims' testimony. They are moral actors, readers of Scripture, and builders of institutions.

Their churches are not interchangeable with the American churches I describe. They include Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, and other traditions, each with different histories, worship, and relationships to the wider Christian world. Their diversity is part of the fact we neglected when we spoke as though Christianity in the Holy Land had ended with the New Testament and resumed with foreign pilgrims. Nor can a single ecumenical document represent every individual believer within those churches. Reading one is an opening to a conversation, not a substitute for the conversation itself.

I imagine the composite American room again, though I do not invent a scene in Gaza. A teacher puts up a map and traces an arrow from a verse to a contemporary border. A member asks, “Who lives there?” A person could answer with names of peoples and perhaps churches. The question changes the scale of the lesson. It does not solve a conflict, but it makes it harder to use a map as if nothing inhabited it. The next questions become possible: what do those people say, what has happened to them, and how does our teaching affect what our government is asked to do?

Those questions cannot be delegated to the fact that a Palestinian Christian shares our creed. It is equally necessary to hear Palestinian Muslims, secular Palestinians, and the Israelis whose families fear attacks. Still, the discovery of a silenced Christian neighbor can be the first fracture in an inherited picture. A believer who had imagined the Holy Land as empty space awaiting prophetic events may find, to some

embarrassment, that fellow believers have been writing letters to the world for years. The embarrassment should be allowed to do its work.

The church's task is neither to replace one invisible population with another nor to declare a particular Palestinian statement infallible. It is to bring the living into the frame and then argue honestly about history, theology, law, and policy. Hearing is an act with consequences. Once we know that the people we discuss are speaking, our claim that we were only following the Bible has to answer their charge that we have used it to make them disappear.

Chapter 23: From Footnotes to Politics

In the composite church of the prologue, the distance from a Bible lesson to Congress seems almost impossible to measure. A person has come to worship, hear a sermon, and perhaps carry a casserole to a sick neighbor. The Capitol is far away. The legislator has never entered this room. No one needs to say the word lobbyist. Yet the people in the pews are also voters, donors, readers of action alerts, and members of groups that speak in their name. The distance can be crossed in a few ordinary steps.

For much of this book I have been asking how an interpretation travels. It moves from a note to a teacher and from a teacher to a congregation. Here another transition comes into view. A belief about the land becomes a claim about a government; the claim becomes a judgment about what the United States ought to do. At that point an account of biblical prophecy has entered political life. It has not ceased to be theology. It has acquired a public consequence for people who may not share it and who cannot escape its effects.

The steps should be described plainly. First, a church teaches that the people and state of modern Israel hold a special place in God’s plan. Second, an organization turns that conviction into a program of education and action. Third, it asks members to contact elected officials about identifiable legislation or executive policy. Fourth, those officials make decisions in a field crowded with military strategy, diplomacy, electoral incentives, other advocacy groups, and public opinion. We can document the first three steps in particular cases. The fourth requires humility. A politician’s vote does not reveal the precise weight of any one group’s pressure.

It may help to consider an earlier decision precisely because I cannot trace it back to a single footnote. President Harry Truman recognized the provisional government of the new State of Israel in May 1948. The Truman Presidential Library's chronology describes the aftermath of the Holocaust, debates over Jewish refugees and immigration, the British Mandate, the United Nations partition proposal, State Department objections, domestic correspondence, and Truman's personal decisions. It records that his longtime friend Eddie Jacobson pressed for a meeting with Chaim Weizmann, and that the president met Weizmann in March. Clark Clifford argued for recognition; George Marshall opposed his reasoning. Those are documentary links. An alleged line from Scofield through a New York lawyer to Truman is not supplied by them.

Truman's story matters for another reason. Americans sometimes recount his recognition as a single act of biblical faith, or as the achievement of a single adviser or personal friendship. The archive resists those reductions. A president can know biblical language and still weigh refugees, strategic risks, diplomatic commitments, electoral pressures, and the testimony of individuals. These influences are not equal merely because they can be listed together; tracing their weight requires records and argument. Nor does a judgment about recognition in 1948 settle the duties of a state or of an American church in a war nearly eight decades later. A source can help explain a decision without making that decision a standing absolution for everything afterward.

The Didache's instructions about traveling teachers offer an odd but useful analogy for a modern political message. The early community is to receive a person and then test the teaching and conduct. A church today can welcome a speaker who honors Jewish suffering and teaches about the land. It should ask whether the same speaker tells the truth about Palestinians, distinguishes a promise from a policy, and responds to contrary evidence. Does a claim increase righteousness and knowledge, the text's own terms of commendation, or does it train hearers to exempt a government from judgment? A lobbying organization is not a traveling prophet. The analogy sets a discipline for the church that gives an organization its trust.

Such testing has to remain reciprocal. A speaker from a Palestinian advocacy group can make a bad historical claim; a church opposed to Christian Zionism can slide from criticism of Israeli policy into language that carries an old anti-Jewish accusation. The appropriate response is to correct the error and keep persons distinct from institutions. If the church only subjects one side's witnesses to this examination, the test becomes an instrument of loyalty rather than a search for truth. The Didache's warning against false teachers is not a permit to call every unsettling witness false.

Christians United for Israel, known as CUFI, offers a useful public example because it describes its own work. Its Israel Course is presented as a twenty-lesson program designed to educate, motivate, and activate Christians. Participants are taught about Christian connection to Israel, Jewish connection to the land, and Israel’s place among the nations. This is more than a private devotional exercise. The organization invites people to study, to host groups, to join a network, and to speak and act on Israel’s behalf. It openly seeks a path from religious conviction to public advocacy.

There is nothing inherently illicit about that path. Christians have organized against slavery, for civil rights, for the protection of refugees, and for many other causes. Jewish organizations, Palestinian organizations, secular organizations, and veterans’ groups likewise urge government action. Citizens may petition their representatives. The issue here is the content of the teaching and the direction of the petition. A biblical claim is offered as a reason to prefer one side’s political program. The people harmed by that program also deserve to be heard.

In April 2024, during Israel’s war in Gaza, CUFI hosted an emergency gathering in Washington. Its account says that 250 ministry and community leaders met members of Congress to support emergency aid to Israel. It also says that nearly 65,000 Christian Zionists responded to its action alert in advance of the House vote. CUFI applauded passage of the aid. Those numbers are the organization’s reported figures, not an independent count of effective contacts or of persuaded legislators. Yet the reported action itself is not hidden. Leaders were asked to go to Capitol Hill, members were asked to respond, and the organization told the public what it wanted Congress to do.

The fact that a message is public allows a member to examine it before agreeing. In this case the alert called for both the aid and the rule that brought it to the floor. A congregation might ask the difference between supporting a defensive system, replenishing munitions, providing humanitarian relief, and giving a government discretion to continue an operation. The answer depends on the actual bill and subsequent administration. “Aid to Israel” is too broad a phrase to tell a conscientious voter exactly what will be transferred and under what conditions. CUFI has every right to state a position. Members need the freedom to ask what the position covers and what it leaves out without being told that the Bible has already determined each line item.

That is the bridge in visible form. The church supplies trusted leaders and a moral vocabulary. The advocacy group supplies curriculum, an email list, a Washington event, and a policy request. The lawmaker hears from constituents and organizations. None of this requires a secret patron, an occult club, or a command issued from the margin of a Bible. It is the normal machinery of participatory politics, which makes examination more urgent rather than less. The claims made in public can be tested in public.

CUFI also published a response to President Biden’s call in April 2024 for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Its leaders opposed placing that demand on Israel. In its policy agenda, CUFI says it supports U.S. aid to Israel, opposes international pressure on Israel to make concessions it does not wish to make, and supports measures against what it regards as terrorism and antisemitism. These positions need to be assessed on their own terms. Some Christians will support military aid in the belief that it protects civilians against rocket

fire or future attacks. Others will argue that an immediate ceasefire protects civilians on both sides, permits relief, and creates space to recover captives. What cannot be claimed is that a Christian Zionist organization has confined itself to prayer while events elsewhere merely unfold.

In fact, the organization makes an even larger claim about its influence. It presents a record of email campaigns, mobilization around the U.S. embassy in Jerusalem, legislative priorities, and the 2024 aid package. Its account is a useful source for what it sought to do and for how it understands its success. It is not a controlled experiment proving that its efforts determined a result. The embassy decision had many advocates; aid to Israel has long enjoyed broad support in both parties; administrations take account of strategic interests and alliances. When a movement calls itself decisive, an investigator should neither repeat the boast uncritically nor pretend the action did not occur.

Surveys can show the wider climate, though they cannot isolate the effect of a particular Bible. Pew Research Center has found that white evangelical Protestants have been especially likely among U.S. religious groups to affirm that God gave the land that is now Israel to Jewish people. The wording of such a question matters. A person can answer yes while opposing settlements, a bombing campaign, or an unconditioned arms transfer. Conversely, a person can support those policies for reasons unrelated to prophecy. Pew's observations place a land belief in a social setting; they do not establish a direct line from Scofield's notes to a vote in Congress. The distinction between a belief's presence and its measured political effect must be maintained.

This caution also applies to my own churches. I know how people spoke around me, and I can describe the habits I found. I cannot count how many read Scofield, how many heard the same ideas from a later preacher, and how many simply inherited an American identification with Israel. A familiar statement about blessing Israel may contain several motives at once: fear of antisemitism, memory of the Holocaust, trust in a democratic ally, an interpretation of Genesis, family ties, or distrust of Hamas. The motives can coexist. One can examine the theology without announcing that every supporter has been moved by exactly the same text.

I also know that agreement in a room can be less complete than it sounds. A member may quietly wonder whether a phrase in a sermon is true and choose not to ask because the cost of asking seems too high. The social penalty is rarely written down. Perhaps the questioner is told that a lack of support for Israel reveals a lack of faith. Perhaps friends offer anxious counsel, or a teacher stops inviting that person to lead a class. I cannot assign these imagined details to a particular church. The mechanism, however, is familiar to anyone who has watched dissent become a test of belonging. If enough people keep a question to themselves, the pastor may hear silence as confirmation. A false consensus then returns to the congregation as evidence that everyone agrees.

This matters politically. A movement can present a unified Christian constituency when some of its members have simply learned not to speak. Legislators may reasonably count messages they receive, but no one should confuse the most mobilized messages with every Christian's considered view. A congregation that makes disagreement costly has helped to distort its own public voice. Giving dissent room is therefore a way of telling the truth about what the community actually thinks.

There is a humane reason to be careful. On October 7, 2023, Hamas and other armed groups attacked civilians in Israel and took hostages. The crimes were real. Jewish communities also face real antisemitism, including in the United States. It is not a moral defect for a church to grieve murdered Israelis or to ask that Jewish people live without fear. A church fails when it treats those truths as a reason to stop seeing

Palestinian civilians. The child in Gaza does not become less human because a child in Israel was killed. Neither grief is honored by converting it into a permit for the other's suffering.

Nor is Christian Zionism identical with all concern for Jewish safety. Many Christians who reject Scofield's scheme still oppose antisemitism and support Israel's security within law. Many Jews reject policies advocated in their name. Many Palestinians seek a political future that safeguards both peoples. There are even voices within Pentecostal life that refuse the simple division. An Assemblies of God publication brought leaders from its Jewish and Arabic fellowships into the same conversation after October 7. Their emphases differed, but the very existence of the exchange undercuts the notion that one side's pain must erase the other's. The church already has members able to widen its attention if it will listen.

The organized movement's own language deserves close scrutiny at the point where ancient and modern terms meet. A lesson about Abraham may begin with an ancient covenant, move to an ancient people's attachment to a land, and end with a request to preserve a contemporary state's military advantage. Those are related topics, but they are not identical propositions. Between them stand the histories of empire, nationalism, migration, expulsion, war, international law, and the lives of people already on the land. A listener who agrees with the first claim has not thereby answered every question in the last one. Good teaching would tell its students exactly where a scriptural interpretation ends and a present policy judgment begins.

The danger of moving too quickly is visible when someone asks what a congregation should do about civilian deaths and receives only an answer about Israel's biblical role. A policy argument may include military necessity, limits on targeting, civilian evacuation, food and medicine, hostages, and accountability. Each claim requires evidence. Prophecy supplies none of the particulars. It cannot establish that a specific weapon was used lawfully, that a crossing admitted enough aid, or that a ceasefire proposal was feasible. If it is offered as a substitute for investigation, its function has changed. It has become a way of ending moral inquiry.

Some pastors might say that politics should be kept out of the pulpit. If the pulpit has already taught that voters must support the state of Israel because God commands it, the boundary has already been crossed. A preacher cannot claim political innocence after giving the congregation a political obligation. The more responsible course is to name the obligation as a contested interpretation and submit its practical consequences to ordinary scrutiny. What would this aid pay for? Who can account for it? How will civilians be protected? What demands are being placed on each party? A person who brings Scripture into a policy dispute owes fellow citizens a clear argument as well as a verse.

I can imagine a Sunday school lesson that makes the transition visible by writing four claims on a board. The first is textual: what Genesis says in its context. The second is theological: how this congregation reads the promise in light of Christ and Israel. The third is historical: what peoples and institutions exist on the land now, and what has happened to them. The fourth is political: what the proposed American action will do to those people. A student may disagree with me at the second line. She should still see that the fourth does not simply repeat the first. A leader who draws an arrow across all four lines without explaining the changes has concealed the most consequential steps. A class willing to pause at each line might make disagreement more exact and loyalty less anxious.

There is another temptation: to trace a single continuous chain from Scofield to CUFI as though a century of people were merely passing one book along. CUFI's founders and members have their own sources, experiences, and institutional history. Contemporary pro-Israel advocacy has roots in Holocaust memory,

U.S. strategic policy, evangelical theology, and Jewish-Christian relations. A rigid Scofield system may have helped supply categories that later teachers repeated; it cannot be treated as the one original cause of every action. Historical responsibility is usually distributed through a network. A source of ideas matters even when other sources matter too.

That distributed history does not dissolve accountability. A legislature may be moved by several pressures, but each group still answers for what it requested. A church member may have learned a conviction from several teachers, but she still answers for how she uses it when others' lives are at stake. If a movement publicly presses for aid while resisting pressure for a ceasefire, its own statements are enough to open a moral examination. We do not need to prove it controlled Congress before asking whether its program made protection of civilians harder to demand.

The question is more precise than whether aid, in the abstract, is good or bad. A missile-defense system intended to intercept an attack differs from a weapon that can strike a populated neighborhood. Humanitarian assistance differs from security assistance, even when both are included in a legislative package. Conditions on transfers, monitoring of use, and a government's willingness to suspend supply after documented abuses all matter. CUFI's advocacy for a package establishes the policy direction it favored. It does not tell us that every item in the package had the same effect, nor that every church supporter had examined its provisions. A Christian argument should be exact enough to make these distinctions.

So, too, should an argument for a ceasefire. Its terms, enforcement, provisions for captives, and effect on civilians require analysis. The moral obligation to seek an end to killing does not make every diplomatic instrument equally workable. These qualifications allow a reader to move from a broad confession of concern to a judgment about measures that can be proposed, revised, and evaluated. The church has too often jumped from biblical certainty to a policy position while refusing the intermediate work.

I have sometimes imagined the opposite sequence in the composite church. A pastor announces an evening meeting about the land, and before anyone speaks of an end-times chart, a Palestinian Christian and a Jewish Christian each describes the people for whom they pray. The group reads the ancient texts. Then it reads a current account of a displaced family, an account of an Israeli family affected by violence, and the actual language of a proposal before Congress. Someone asks what can be affirmed, what remains uncertain, and what a Christian should refuse to endorse. The pastor does not settle every question. The congregation leaves with more work to do.

Such a meeting might seem less exciting than a prophecy conference. It could also be a form of revival. The people would be bringing their public judgments within reach of their professed faith. They would learn to distinguish a verse, an annotation, a lobbying message, and a law. Each could be examined without treating the act of examination as betrayal.

The political bridge is built of small, ordinary pieces: a lesson, a signup form, an email, a meeting, a vote. For that reason it can also be crossed in another direction. A church may teach an ancient promise and still insist that no present government stands above the demands of justice. It may ask its members to defend Jewish and Palestinian civilians together. It may tell a representative that aid must be judged by what it does to actual people. These choices do not guarantee a particular law. They do restore the believer's responsibility at every point where a belief becomes an action.

I want the bridge to remain visible. Invisibility was part of the problem. Once the route from the church door to the legislature can be seen, a Christian must decide whether to walk it with eyes open.

Chapter 24: Gaza and Partial Blame

Gaza is a place where an argument about religion encounters a body. The person needing water has no use for my taxonomy of dispensations. A mother trying to find shelter cannot wait for a Christian to decide whether Romans 11 predicts a national restoration. This is not a reason to abandon theology. It is a reason to test what theology has done to our ability to notice her.

I use the word genocide for what has happened in Gaza. I know how grave the word is. It describes the destruction of a protected group, in whole or in part, with a specific intent that must be assessed by evidence. It is not simply another word for a great number of dead civilians or for a war one opposes. My use is a moral judgment informed by the pattern of destruction, deprivation, displacement, public statements, and the findings of investigators. It should be argued, and the legal status of the matter should be stated accurately.

South Africa brought a case against Israel under the Genocide Convention before the International Court of Justice. The court ordered provisional measures in 2024. Those measures concerned protection of Palestinians in Gaza, prevention of prohibited acts and incitement, preservation of evidence, and humanitarian relief; subsequent orders addressed worsening conditions. Provisional measures are binding, but they are not a final judgment that genocide has occurred. As of September 2026, the case has continued through written proceedings; a May 2026 order concerned the schedule for further submissions. The court has not issued a judgment on the merits. A church that cites the court must be able to say both things at once: the orders are serious, and the ultimate legal question remains before it.

The International Criminal Court is a different court with a different task. In November 2024 it issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant concerning alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity arising from the Gaza war. An arrest warrant is not a conviction. Those warrants are not an ICC finding of genocide. Confusing the courts, charges, and procedural stages may make a sermon sound forceful for a minute, but it makes the congregation less able to judge anything honestly.

The United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry reached its own conclusion in 2025 that Israel had committed genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. Its finding is significant and should not be hidden behind the fact that the International Court of Justice has not completed its case. It is also a commission’s finding, not a judgment by that court. Israel rejects the accusation, saying its campaign was directed at Hamas after the October 7 attacks and denying an intent to destroy Palestinians as a group. I do not find that denial sufficient to answer the evidence, but the reader should know it exists and should be free to examine the competing arguments. Careful attribution is a form of moral seriousness, not a retreat from judgment.

The distinction among a moral judgment, an investigative finding, an arrest warrant, provisional protection, and a final verdict is consequential. If I collapse all five into “the court said,” I give a critic a legitimate reason to distrust my account. A Christian reader who disagrees with my conclusion can test the argument in the evidence rather than in an invented procedural claim. A person persuaded by the Commission of Inquiry can cite its conclusion on its own authority. The legal status as I describe it belongs to September 2026; a later edition of this book will have to check for later filings and rulings. A war may be ongoing, but a printed legal sentence does not update itself.

The name of the crime can also absorb so much argument that ordinary duties are made to wait on it. A church member says she is uncertain whether the specific intent required by the Genocide Convention has

been proved. Fair enough: legal intent is a demanding question. She can still oppose attacks on civilians, deprivation of food and medicine, forced displacement contrary to law, and a policy of impunity, if the evidence supports those concerns. Another member may call the destruction genocide with confidence. That conviction does not relieve him of the obligation to check a particular allegation before sharing it. One person's hesitation and the other's certainty have different legal consequences; neither cancels the duty to protect a life that is exposed now.

There are more immediate facts no one should need to await a final judgment to consider. United Nations humanitarian reports document destruction of housing, disruption of medical care, displacement, unsafe living conditions, and continuing needs for food, water, shelter, and fuel. Their numbers and access assessments change. They are gathered under difficult conditions, sometimes from local authorities, and should be dated when quoted. I have chosen here to emphasize the documented conditions rather than make one day’s toll the center of a book that will be read later. Whatever a future court decides about intent, the living must receive water now.

The origin of this phase of war must also be named without evasion. Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups attacked Israeli communities on October 7, 2023, killing civilians and taking hostages. A United Nations commission found that armed groups committed war crimes in that assault. Those acts cannot be defended as a prophetic necessity, an inevitable answer to occupation, or an incidental prelude to the event I wish to discuss. Jewish fear after the massacre was rational. The grief of families of the murdered and captive is not an obstacle to Palestinian humanity. An argument that requires us to rank one set of civilians below the other has already failed its moral test.

The state of Israel has duties of protection toward its people. Those duties do not erase its duties toward civilians in Gaza. The prohibition on targeting civilians, the duty to distinguish combatants from civilians, the obligations concerning proportionality and aid, and the prohibition on taking hostages are not privileges one side receives after the other behaves well. They constrain armed actors precisely when terror, fear, and retaliation make restraint difficult. A Christian who can recite the names of ancient kings should be able to grasp that a child is not a combatant by birth.

At this point I have to speak about partial blame. The phrase can sound either too bold or too timid. Too bold, because the bomb is dropped by a military force, policy is set by governments, and the armed conflict has a long history independent of an American congregation. Too timid, because the word partial may seem to soften a moral indictment into a polite observation. I intend it to specify the responsibility at issue. I am not claiming that Scofield ordered the war, that all Pentecostals supported its conduct, or that my neighbors could stop it by changing their minds. I am arguing that particular Christians helped create and sustain a political environment in which grave harm could be excused, overlooked, or made harder to restrain.

The argument is strongest when each link can be named without smuggling the next one into it. Scofield printed an interpretive scheme that separated Israel and the church within a larger prophetic design. A later teacher who adopted some of those distinctions bears responsibility for the teaching she gave, not for every act ever committed under the name of Israel. A present organization that calls for aid and resists a ceasefire has made public, dated requests for which it can be questioned. A legislator and an executive official make their own decisions among many demands. A government and an armed force make decisions still closer to the harm. None of these agents disappears because another agent exists. Yet it would be false to assign them one undifferentiated share of guilt.

The causal limit matters to me as a scientist. I cannot design a counterfactual experiment in which the Scofield Bible was never printed and then count lives saved in Gaza. There is no honest numerical fraction

of the devastation to place after his name. Even the phrase “Christian support” covers people who advocate opposite policies, people whose conviction comes from a biblical promise, people moved by the Holocaust, and people who think about regional security. My claim is that a particular teaching can make unconditional support feel like obedience, and that visible organizations have translated convictions into demands. The size of the effect in an individual vote or strike remains unmeasured here. Stating the limit keeps the moral claim in the realm where it can be defended.

Tolstoy offers a more severe measure than a causal calculation. He asked what happens to the command of Jesus to love enemies when a state calls its people to violence and a church blesses the call. I agree that the command cannot be locked inside private behavior while a believer endorses public harm. But I should not pretend that Tolstoy solved every duty of protection posed by October 7, by hostages, or by the fear of another attack. A parent who wants an armed assailant stopped is not refuted by a slogan. The harder question is whether the church has let the reality of danger make every means permissible and every civilian beyond its own border expendable. Enemy-love must survive precisely where fear is real, or it has been kept for an easy occasion.

The Didache's two ways sharpen the same point from another angle. Its Way of Death includes not only overt killing but also refusal to pity the poor, failure to labor for the afflicted, love of a lie, and advocacy for the powerful against the vulnerable. The text is ancient and uneven; its own social assumptions require critical reading. I do not use it as a contemporary code of international law. I hear its challenge to the church member who thinks moral responsibility begins and ends with whether his own hands held a weapon. Speech, money, indifference, and the protection a community gives to a powerful story are part of a way of life. So is the decision to examine a distressing account instead of forwarding a comforting explanation.

There are several ways to participate in that environment. A teacher can announce that a modern state must receive unconditional support because Scripture says so. A pastor can repeat that announcement while refusing any close account of what support means in a particular war. An organization can mobilize members against a demand for a ceasefire or in favor of aid without asking adequate questions about civilian protection. An individual can forward the action alert, reward the sermon, or decline to hear testimony from Palestinians. These actions are not equivalent to directing an assault, and I do not assign them equal blame. They are actions nonetheless. Moral responsibility is not exhausted by the criminal law’s account of the person who pulled the trigger.

The same distinction protects innocent people from a blanket accusation. A woman who worships in a Pentecostal church, feeds an unhoused neighbor, and prays for children on both sides is not thereby complicit in every statement made by a national organization. A Jewish person is not responsible for a government simply by being Jewish. A Palestinian is not answerable for Hamas simply by being Palestinian. These elementary distinctions should need no defense. In a time of collective fear, they need constant defense.

I can hear one reply from a church I might once have attended. The congregation’s work is to preach salvation. Its members have no expertise in international law. They have a duty to stand with Israel, but nobody can expect them to solve Gaza. There is truth in the limits of their expertise. Most of us cannot verify an air strike or negotiate a ceasefire. Yet the same lack of expertise should restrain an unqualified proclamation that every act of a state is justified, or that any proposal to restrict aid is a revolt against God. Ignorance cannot be invoked only when the victims ask to be seen. If a pastor has enough knowledge to demand political allegiance, he has enough responsibility to examine its effects.

Another reply is that churches have cared deeply for Israeli victims and their families. I hope they have. Some ministries gave practical help. The objection is not to the help. It is to the narrowing of the circle. Christian compassion cannot be organized as a test in which receiving a Palestinian's account makes one disloyal to a Jewish neighbor. The Gospel's account of neighbor love resists that bargain. A church should find it possible to send aid to a frightened Israeli family and to a displaced Palestinian family without making either donation conditional on a prophecy chart.

There is a third reply, more intellectually substantial: if one believes that God promised a future to Israel, support for the Jewish state need not be unconditional. A Christian could distinguish a theological expectation from a judgment about a settlement, an arms transfer, or civilian deaths. I agree. In fact, that distinction is part of the remedy. The criticism in this book concerns the places where it was erased. A reader who holds a future for Israel while insisting on law, human rights, and Palestinian freedom is arguing with the very habit I criticize. We may still differ over Scripture, but we need not pretend our political conclusions are identical.

Why did the habit become so powerful? One reason is that a system of prophecy offers a sense of scale. It tells believers that an event on the evening news belongs to an enormous design. The person looking for coherence amid frightening events can feel reassured. The difficulty comes when scale replaces attention. A destroyed neighborhood becomes a sign of an approaching consummation; a terrified family becomes a footnote to the sign. The body has been made smaller than the diagram. This is where my objection to a style of church entertainment meets my objection to political theology. A congregation trained to seek the emotional shape of a story may prefer the thrill of recognition to the difficulty of examining what happened.

I do not think the people I knew attended church hoping to see children killed. They sang about mercy and served meals with their own hands. That is what makes their possible participation painful to name. Micro-grace, the help offered at close range, can coexist with macro-violence accepted at a distance. The two are not the same action, but they belong to the same moral life. It is possible to have practiced compassion in the room while adopting a political account that makes compassion harder to extend beyond the room. I have to consider that possibility in myself before placing it on anyone else.

What does it mean to say the first-person pronoun here? I did not write the footnotes or lead a lobby day. I have not served in Congress. For twenty years I inhabited churches where certainty could spread without careful study, and I learned some of that speech. My judgment of my own participation is not a confession to an event I did not witness. It is an acknowledgment that a culture is sustained by ordinary assent. Silence, too, can become one of its habits. If this book is demanding that churches examine themselves, I cannot grant myself an exemption because I later found the words to object.

The suffering itself must not become an instrument for making me feel morally serious. I have not lived in Gaza. The composite scenes in this book are drawn from American church life, not from imagined private thoughts of a Palestinian family. I will not invent the last words of a child or borrow another person's grief for a more affecting page. Public evidence is enough to make a demand on us. A home destroyed, a hospital unable to function, a person displaced again, an Israeli family grieving a murdered relative: these facts do not need me to improve them with fiction.

There is an asymmetry in my argument that should also be explicit. This book asks about Christians who live in the United States and the effect of their theology on U.S. political support for Israel. It does not attempt a full history of Hamas, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or every state that has armed or sheltered a party. That focus is not a declaration that other agents have no responsibility. It is an attempt to examine the

part of the crisis that is near enough for my own community to answer. We are especially capable of investigating what our pulpits teach, what our organizations ask for, and what we have told our representatives.

Responsibility can be examined at more than one scale without becoming a calculation of guilt by association. The author of a note is responsible for what it teaches. A later pastor is responsible for how it is repeated. An advocacy group is responsible for the public demands it makes. A government is responsible for its decisions and conduct. A soldier is responsible within a different set of duties and pressures. The distinctions matter because they tell us what each person could have done differently. If everyone is accused of causing the same thing in the same way, the accusation explains little. If no one examines his own part because someone else made the final decision, a harmful system can continue without resistance.

If the word genocide is contested, the need to protect civilian life from rhetorical erasure is not. One can ask whether the evidence establishes the specific intent required by the Convention. One cannot use the legal dispute as a reason to avoid thinking about hunger, displacement, or the conditions in which children live. A believer who is uncertain of the ultimate legal classification should become more careful with evidence, not less careful with people. The prevention of grave crimes begins before a final court judgment, or it begins too late.

What might responsible partial blame lead a church to do? It could start by withdrawing the claim that a modern government’s actions are immune from criticism because of Genesis. It could distinguish the promise to Abraham from the decisions of a cabinet. It could support investigation of attacks on civilians by all parties, the delivery of aid, and accountability under the rules that bind all armed actors. It could ask whether a political request it made during the war took sufficient account of Palestinian life. Such changes do not require a church to hate Jews or to cease grieving October 7. They require the church to make its grief large enough to include people whom its favored story left outside.

I return to the image of the room after the music. Someone suggests prayer for everyone. Once, that phrase could carry us safely past a hard question. Now I want to hear what the prayer names. Does it include the Israeli who cannot forget the attack on her home? Does it include the Palestinian searching for medicine and a place to sleep? Does it ask us to repent of a claim we repeated without examining? Does it change what we will say when an action alert arrives tomorrow?

If the answer is no, prayer has become a curtain. If the answer is yes, it may begin the slower work of moral repair. Partial blame does not tell us that the church caused all of Gaza. It tells us there is something for the church to confess, investigate, and change. The first duty of a person who can see a wound is to stop calling the wound a sign that everything is going according to plan.

Part V: A Revival of Practice

Chapter 25: Grandmother’s Table

In an earlier paper I used a grandmother’s Sunday dinner as an image for thinking about Christianity before it became a large institution. I called it theological memory, without supplying the biographical details of a particular family meal. I use it here as an analogy, and the small scenes built around it are composite. It is not proof that the earliest churches looked exactly like an American household, and it cannot make a history of Christian worship by itself. It helps me ask a question that the argument over Scofield’s notes has made urgent: What kind of people does a church make when its members are together? A table is a place where a claim about love can be checked before anyone has had time to turn it into a slogan.

I can imagine the scene without asking the reader to mistake every detail for a report of one particular afternoon. There is a table to clear before people can sit. Someone needs the chair nearest the door. The bread or a serving dish will have to travel through several hands. A younger person wants to start while an older person is still being helped into the room. Someone remembers that a relative was meant to come and asks whether anybody called. A household can turn each of these moments into an occasion of attention, or pass them by. Nothing has yet required a theological speech. The conduct around the meal has already begun to disclose its rule of life.

I have seen churches manage impressive services and neglect the corresponding small decisions. It is possible to preach hospitality and make an outsider wait alone in the foyer. It is possible to announce a collection for the poor and leave the people whose need is embarrassing out of the room where decisions are made. It is possible to devote an evening to the Holy Land while never asking what it would be like for a Palestinian Christian to hear the lesson. The table image brings each claim back into reach. Where is the place prepared for the person we say we love? Who controls the food, the story, the speaking, and the blessing? Who can tell us when we have left somebody out?

The Didache does not give us a picture of an unrestricted family dinner. It is an early Christian teaching text, not a photograph of one congregation’s meal. Its instructions concern the Two Ways, baptism, fasting, prayer, thanksgiving over the cup and the broken bread, hospitality, ministers, reconciliation, and readiness for the Lord. It makes distinctions about participation. One of its instructions restricts the community’s eucharistic food and drink to those baptized in the name of the Lord. An interpreter who uses the text to preach nothing but a warm, open table has quietly removed one of its boundaries. I do not want to make the Didache tell us only what would be comfortable to hear. The challenge lies in holding together its invitation to moral life, its practices of a particular community, and its concern that the community not be exploited.

The thanksgiving prayers are striking because they do not begin by asking the worshiper to solve a political map. They give thanks to the Father for life and knowledge made known through Jesus, for food and drink given to human beings, and for spiritual food and drink. They ask for the church to be gathered. The scattered grain gathered into one bread becomes an image of people who are not yet together. The prayers come from a community with its own identity and expectation; they cannot be reduced to a generic meal of goodwill. But their movement is instructive. A worshiping body recognizes that it receives before it rules, that its food comes as a gift, and that its members need to be gathered beyond the little circle presently in view.

I am aware that the relation between those Didache prayers, ordinary meals, and later eucharistic practice is a matter of historical study. I will not use an uncertain reconstruction to tell modern churches that their

sacraments are illegitimate. My point is simpler: an early Christian source joins gratitude, the shared act of eating and drinking, memory of Jesus, and a hope for a gathered church. When our ceremonies become a display watched by an audience, they can lose the force of those verbs. A table asks the people who gather to pass, receive, wait, and notice.

The grandmother in my analogy has authority because she keeps a place where others may be formed. I once described such authority as personal, remembered, and exercised through food, order, and correction. Yet an actual grandmother can be unjust, and an actual family can be cruel. A table can enforce silence as efficiently as any pulpit. The person who serves may be expected to eat last and say nothing. A child may learn fear rather than gratitude. An invitation may conceal a rule that a relative may enter only if he repeats the family's version of events. For that reason, I cannot simply prescribe a return to the household as if smaller were automatically holier. The question remains how a community recognizes and corrects the way it uses power.

Tolstoy saw how much could be hidden by an official claim to possess Christianity. The church might administer the sacraments, name the doctrines, support rulers, and congratulate itself for preserving truth while men trained by it blessed a war. His refusal to accept that contradiction is the part of his witness I want near the table. A blessing spoken above bread should have a consequence for what the same mouth will say about a bomb falling on another household. A church that teaches the command to love enemies cannot treat the command as a decorative text until a real enemy appears. Tolstoy's insistence on action also presses upon a domestic analogy that could otherwise become sentimental. The dinner is not sacred because the memory feels warm. It is sacred, if that word is warranted, in the acts by which persons are received and obligations honored.

Tolstoy also wanted the original Christian teaching simplified into a moral way of life, sometimes at the expense of the Didache's prayers, baptism, offices, and expectation of the Lord's coming. My earlier paper on Tolstoy and the Didache admitted that his recovery was selective. I retain the admission here. If I set his moral clarity against every form of worship, I would ask the Didache to testify against parts of itself. Its witness is more difficult and more useful. The Two Ways do not replace prayer; the prayers do not excuse an unjust way of life. The community must examine teachers; it must also appoint trustworthy local servants. It must wait for the Lord; it must give, confess, and reconcile while it waits. That is a fuller measure than either the prophecy chart or an ethical slogan.

At a congregation's shared meal I would begin with ordinary questions. Are there people who cannot attend because the building is inaccessible, because a ride is not available, or because a family member needs care? Who buys the food, and whose labor is expected without being acknowledged? Does the invitation include the person who questioned a sermon last week? Does an older member who tells a long story still have a listener? Can children ask where the food comes from? A church that pays attention to these things will not become just by paying attention to them. It will have begun to exercise the attentiveness that justice requires.

One could object that I am using the table to replace a church's primary work with social manners. There is more at stake. A doctrine becomes credible through a pattern of living with other people. The claim that Jews and Gentiles are reconciled in Christ was tested in the early church by whether Gentile believers could actually share a meal. Paul did not regard Peter's withdrawal at Antioch as a small breach of etiquette. Table practice disclosed whether the proclaimed gospel would govern ordinary association. Likewise, a church can confess the dignity of all people while forming its members through habits that make some

people easy to overlook. The arrangement of attention at a meal is not the whole of discipleship; it is one place where discipleship shows its shape.

There is a danger on the other side. A pleasant table can make us feel absolved from a difficult public question. A person in southeast Kansas may cook for a neighbor, deliver a casserole after surgery, and still favor a policy that leaves civilians hungry far away. The local kindness is not false. I would not allow my criticism to erase it; I received that kindness in the churches I knew. Yet its reality creates an obligation to ask why the circle of concern ends where it does. The important test is not whether we can extend dinner literally across an ocean. It is whether the person on the other side of the ocean remains a human being when we discuss the decisions that can destroy her house and food supply.

When Gaza appears in an American church, it often comes as a map, a headline, a prayer request, or a claim that a biblical stage is being prepared. A household description changes the scale. Someone had to set out a cup. Someone knew which child refused a certain food. Someone expected a brother to return and left a place for him. Violence does not destroy an abstraction called infrastructure alone; it interrupts all the repeated acts by which persons keep one another alive. The same moral attention belongs to an Israeli household whose members were murdered or taken captive. No theological system deserves the authority to make either table disappear. The details of a particular family must be learned from reliable testimony rather than invented by a writer hoping to stir emotion. My point is that families exist on both sides of a phrase like “the situation in the Middle East.”

A church cannot feed the dead back to life. It can refuse to turn their deaths into a sign to be decoded before the mourning is heard. It can choose relief agencies carefully and ask what reaches families. It can listen to Palestinian Christians as members of a living church rather than extras in an inherited drama. It can listen to Jewish neighbors speak of the fears shaped by centuries of persecution and by the October 7 attacks, without assigning a government immunity from moral criticism. If a household image works at all, it ought to make conversation with these living people more concrete, not replace their words with my imagination.

The Didache’s instructions on giving also put pressure on the comfortable host. In its early moral section, generosity is not a performative gesture toward a favored cause. The giver is warned against refusing the needy, and the receiver is also brought under a serious moral expectation. In the later instructions, the community must support a genuine prophet or teacher who settles among them, but distinguish such a person from one who exploits their hospitality. This is a material religion. It asks who eats and who pays. It resists both the fantasy of pure spirituality without economic life and the notion that any spiritual claim entitles its speaker to the community’s money.

The ancient meal also complicates the modern preference to make belonging entirely private. A person in the Didache’s community did not decide alone what baptism, fasting, confession, or gathering meant. Others could teach and correct. That kind of shared life can be oppressive, particularly when a powerful person claims to know the hidden state of another’s soul. It can also sustain a promise an isolated believer could not keep alone. If the church teaches a child to name the needy as neighbors, it must give the child a way to encounter the claim as an adult, when a job, a bill, and a political argument complicate generosity. A repeated meal can carry a moral memory across those changes. The task is to keep the memory accountable to the people it forms.

I would ask who is left to clear the table after a supposedly radical gathering. Early Christian language about service can be used to romanticize work that falls almost entirely upon women or people with little status. My household analogy becomes dishonest if the one who cooks and washes is missing from the account of holiness. A congregation can honor such labor by sharing it, paying for work that is paid

elsewhere, and listening when the worker says the arrangements are unfair. The moral meaning of a table is found as much in preparation and cleanup as in the moment when a speaker lifts the bread. If one person's unpaid exhaustion makes the community's generous self-image possible, its picture of the early church has concealed a present injustice.

Imagine a fellowship dinner where a visiting teacher receives the best food, offers a thrilling interpretation of current events, and leaves with a large gift. The hosts may feel honored to be part of something urgent. Suppose the church has no comparable practice for learning whether the relief fund it promoted helped the people named in its appeal. A difficult question becomes available: Has the visitor taught us to share resources wisely, or merely to spend them on the feeling of having responded? The question need not be an accusation. It is a duty owed to both donor and recipient. A person who gives out of limited means should be able to know whether an appeal has been truthful.

The church's ordinary administration matters here. I have written critically of corporate certainty, the transformation of living faith into institutional self-protection. That criticism cannot be a license to do without accounts, safeguards, or agreed responsibility. A household led only by charisma can become a place where everyone knows an abuse and nobody can challenge it. A church that has children, dependent adults, workers, and donations needs records and accountable leaders. The Didache itself does not propose a world with no order. It distinguishes visitors from settled ministers; it tells the community to appoint bishops and deacons who are truthful and not devoted to money; it gives procedures for correction and reconciliation. The lesson is to make structures answerable to the Way of Life, not to pretend structures can be abolished by a warmer metaphor.

What then does grandmother's table contribute to a book about Scofield? A footnote has no face. It can place a complete scheme beside a text and make a reader feel that the work of interpretation has already been done. At a table, the scheme must meet another person. If a visitor says that God gave a land permanently to one people, another member can ask what the visitor believes should happen to the people who live there now. If the answer is a policy, the group can ask what the policy has done. If the answer is that God will sort out the injustice in the end, the group can read the same Scriptures' commands about justice in the present. No one has to win the argument by loudness. The presence of the other person prevents the argument from being conducted in a world made only of categories.

The table also invites a different relation to expertise. I trained as a scientist, and I know the appeal of a system that makes a large body of evidence intelligible. A model can be a powerful instrument. It can also produce a tidy explanation of a result that ought to force its revision. At the imagined grandmother's table, an elegant explanation for why a missing relative did not really count would leave the empty chair in place. The image does not refute a proposition in itself. It asks the proposition to account for what it has rendered invisible. In theology, the Bible's own testimony must be read carefully. In public life, the persons affected must be heard. A model that demands blindness as the price of consistency has failed the test a table can administer.

There may be a person at that table who objects to my politics and regards my reading of Paul as mistaken. I want that person to remain able to sit, speak, and be answered. The meal is not a device for making everyone agree. It is a discipline against the temptation to keep only agreeable people visible. A Jewish guest should not have to defend the acts of a state to be treated as a neighbor. A Palestinian Christian should not have to renounce concern for Palestinian freedom to be admitted as a fellow believer. A veteran or an evangelical pastor who has changed his position should not be made to stand in public penance to

prove that his change is sincere. A table that can hold disagreement without assigning somebody a diminished humanity offers a real beginning.

The language of kinship must be used with caution. Calling all people a family can disguise sharp inequalities in power. A church may say, “We are all one,” and then ask the least secure member to absorb an injury for the sake of peace. The Didache’s call to confess and reconcile cannot be applied as a shortcut around truth. If a leader misstates evidence, he should correct the claim. If money is misused, records should be examined and restitution considered. If someone was excluded for asking a legitimate question, a warm invitation is not enough; the reason for the exclusion must be named. At the table, peace is the work of repaired relations, not the silencing of the person who noticed the break.

I return to the imagined dinner. The dishes have been passed once. Someone asks whether there is enough for the person who has not yet arrived. One answer is an efficient no: the meal was planned for the people in the room. Another answer is to make a little room and see what is possible. Neither answer can end a war. But one of them trains the company to count only the present circle. The church must learn to count the absent without claiming it can put every person at its table. It can ask whom its teaching has kept absent from its concern, and what it would have to change to make that concern visible in its giving, its speech, and its civic action.

Tolstoy’s command to take Jesus seriously and the Didache’s rule for a disciplined community meet here. I do not need to choose between a morally demanding Christianity and the worshiping body whose life makes that demand habitual. The more difficult question is whether a body that worships will let its practice judge its claims. We can thank God for bread while others are hungry, but we cannot thank God truthfully by calling their hunger the necessary arrangement of a prophecy. We can ask to be gathered while protecting an interpretation that makes some Christians in the land disappear. The prayer becomes an indictment if we refuse to hear it.

The grandmother’s table does not take me back to an unfallen church. It gives me a smaller measure of a large word. Revival may begin when people who have sung of love take enough time to set another place, hear another account, and correct what they have taught. The meal ends; the work does not. Someone has to wash what was used and prepare for the next gathering. In that ordinary continuation, the church’s account of the world becomes something more than a note in the margin.

I would like the congregation to ask one question before it makes this image into a program: Who has the freedom to decline our invitation? A table offered by a powerful host can place a guest under pressure to be agreeable. The person may accept food and feel unable to describe the harm the host’s public advocacy has caused. A Palestinian Christian invited to an American fellowship meal should not be required to supply gratitude for the church’s interest, much less absolve its past teaching. A Jewish guest should not be asked to perform an entire people’s history for a Bible class. Hospitality gives the guest room to speak, to disagree, and sometimes to leave. The host’s obligation does not end when the plates are full. It includes the discipline to hear an account of the host’s own conduct without turning it into a debate over whether the guest has been sufficiently polite. The household analogy becomes useful only when the host understands that another person’s presence is not a possession.

Chapter 26: A Congregation That Tests Its Teachers

Chapter 10 examined why the Didache asks a community to receive teachers and test them. Here the question is what a congregation can put in place before the visiting teacher reaches the microphone. An invitation should name the subject, the expected appeal for money if any, the people who will review an appeal, and the way listeners may ask substantive questions afterward. The pastor who invites the speaker remains responsible for what the church promotes. Hospitality does not require that the organization surrender its judgment to a guest’s confidence, and review does not require treating every guest as a suspect.

I imagine a composite Kansas church preparing for an evening about Israel. Its leaders are tempted to let the visitor choose all the maps and decide which policies God requires. Instead, they ask in advance for the presentation and the organization’s public financial information. They ask whether the visitor will describe a theological view, a specific public action, or both. The visitor remains free to argue passionately. The church also commits to tell members which claims are his interpretation, which claims concern present facts, and which appeal is being made on behalf of his ministry. If the visitor refuses even to say what he intends to ask for, the congregation can decline the invitation without declaring him a false prophet.

After the service, the leaders compare their notes on what was actually said. One passage concerns the promise to Abraham. A second claim identifies a photograph. A third urges letters to a legislator. The fourth requests a gift to fund trips. They must be checked in different ways. The first needs a biblical argument that can be read against alternatives. The photograph needs a date, place, and source. The political request needs its likely human effects examined. The gift needs an account of the beneficiary and the organization receiving it. No emotional unity in the room can turn these separate questions into a single authenticated message.

The first reply to a concern need not be a public condemnation. A member can say that the map’s date appears wrong. The church can ask the visitor for its source and give him a fair chance to respond. If he corrects the date, the church tells the listeners so. If he cannot substantiate it, the church withdraws the map from its own future teaching. If he argues that scrutiny of the map is an assault on his anointing, the response has disclosed a different problem about accountability. An agreed process lets the church act without making each questioner prove her courage alone at the church door.

Financial discernment requires a system more stable than a pastor’s instinct. A church can state in advance how an appeal will be reviewed, who must disclose conflicts of interest, where funds are held, and when members can see a simple report. It can distinguish money for a speaker’s reasonable labor and expenses from a pressure appeal whose urgency prevents examination. The Didache supports the genuine teacher’s material needs; it does not tell the community to make teachers live without food. At the same time, it joins spiritual credibility to freedom from a love of money. A modern church should neither humiliate a worker for being paid nor hide a large transfer behind the claim that spiritual work cannot be accounted for.

Consider what a short written policy could accomplish. Before a visitor arrives, two people who will not benefit from the appeal review its stated purpose and available accounts. The invitation states whether literature may be sold and who receives the proceeds. If a collection is taken, the church records its amount separately from its own budget and reports the transfer to the congregation. If the guest asks for an unplanned urgent gift, the church can offer to receive pledges after a review rather than pass a plate under the pressure of the moment. This arrangement does not prove the visitor’s doctrine true. It prevents a

genuine spiritual response from being made inseparable from a financial decision nobody had time to understand. It also protects a trustworthy visitor from later insinuation because the terms were known.

The reviewer's independence needs attention. In a small church, everyone may be related or closely connected. A pastor may have accepted a trip from the very ministry whose appeal he proposes to host. A deacon may want the church's sponsorship because it will increase business for a relative. These interests do not make the people involved dishonest. They belong on the record, and the decision should be made by others. A simple disclosure can spare the congregation a bitter dispute later. It teaches that trust can be strengthened by facts instead of being demanded in place of them. If there is no one capable of independent review, the church can ask for help from another congregation or decline the appeal until it has the capacity.

The same rule should apply when the beneficiary is one I favor. A Palestinian relief appeal requires verification. A Jewish relief appeal requires verification. An organization that says it serves survivors may do excellent work, inefficient work, or no work at all. Good intentions are not an audit. The church should not answer a partisan exaggeration with an exaggeration of its own. A commitment to visible people becomes credible when it can tell the donors what reached them and when it can say that a proposed project failed its review.

The church could learn from a tour invitation in the same way. A visit to biblical sites can deepen a reader's sense of place. It can also teach by omission. The itinerary may dwell on ancient stones and pass a living Palestinian town without a conversation with anyone there, or hear Israeli fear only from an official guide. Before promoting a trip, the church could ask who selected the encounters, which communities receive its money, what access is possible under the current conditions, and whether the travelers will meet Christians, Jews, and Muslims as persons with their own accounts. A tour is not invalid because its every day cannot contain the whole conflict. It should not be advertised as a complete acquaintance with the land when its design excluded people whose lives contradict the favored lesson. A returned traveler may speak with useful humility: "This is what I saw and what I could not see." That sentence would give the next congregation more than a confident slide show.

One may also test a book chosen to replace Scofield. I am arguing against a scheme that has power in the churches I knew. That does not mean that an attractive anti-Scofield writer should be given unexamined authority. A class can identify the passages such a writer interprets persuasively and those he skips. It can ask whether he distinguishes a twentieth-century state from Jewish people in all his examples, not only in a careful introduction. It can notice whether an emotionally compelling history includes dates and sources that withstand inspection. The habit of testing the teacher should survive a change in the church's theological position. Otherwise we have merely changed which marginal note no one may question.

Local leaders do not receive a free pass because the visiting teacher has left. The Didache tells its hearers to appoint bishops and deacons who are meek, truthful, and not lovers of money, and to hold their service in honor alongside that of prophets and teachers. The document has no interest in a permanent suspicion of office as such. It asks the community to judge the kind of person who holds it. If a pastor rebukes a traveling prophet for asking for money while concealing his own ministry accounts, the test has become a weapon against a rival. If a congregation demands meekness only of its deacons while its senior voice humiliates questioners, the test has been split in half.

The choice of local leaders tells a church what it expects leadership to accomplish. A skillful speaker can gather a crowd. A careful administrator can keep the doors open. Both capacities matter. Neither establishes that the person will tell the truth when truth costs attendance or income. The Didache names

qualities that ought to be observed over time, in ordinary dealings, where a leader cannot rely on an extraordinary evening. Has the person shared credit? When corrected on a small fact, did he correct it plainly? When someone with little status disagreed, did she receive an answer without retaliation? Has the leader treated church money as entrusted property rather than proof of a private mandate? A committee may learn more about a prospective teacher by asking such questions than by watching a polished sample sermon.

There is also a difference between testing a teacher and conducting a trial without an end. A church that treats every fresh interpretation as dangerous will produce a thin, fearful faith. The Didache begins by telling the hearers to receive a teaching that increases righteousness and knowledge of the Lord. Its warnings respond to a real vulnerability rather than a demand for intellectual uniformity. I would expect a responsible church to allow someone to challenge Scofield, to defend a limited dispensational reading, to question Tolstoy, and to read the Didache from a sacramental tradition. A test worthy of the name can hear competing readings without attaching a suspicion of disloyalty to the act of asking for evidence.

What if the disagreement concerns the Bible itself? A footnote gives the reader a useful opportunity to practice. In a class, members can read the verse aloud, then the note, and put the Bible down on the table long enough to describe the difference. Does the note translate a word, supply background, cross-reference a related passage, or tell us that an event must happen in a particular order? The first two can usually be checked against reference works; the last requires an argument from the wider scriptural text. “It is in my Bible” is true of the physical note and insufficient as a reason to identify the note with the Bible’s voice. The simple exercise can be repeated with a note whose conclusion I like. Otherwise the method merely arms a faction against one publisher.

A teacher may reply that ordinary members cannot become experts in Hebrew, Greek, the history of the Ottoman Empire, and contemporary humanitarian law. Of course they cannot. That is one reason a leader should be modest about claims that cross several of those fields in the same breath. Discernment does not require everyone to master everything. It requires the community to distinguish the kind of claim, identify what competence is needed to assess it, consult people with that competence, and admit what remains unknown. A specialist may speak authoritatively about a narrow matter without becoming an oracle over all the others. My training in biophysics gives me reason to value expertise and reason to know how far one field’s methods reach.

The most dangerous teaching often arrives in the form of a moral exemption. The congregation knows in ordinary life that children should not be intentionally harmed, that the hungry should be fed, and that a government can be criticized. Then a speaker says that this particular land, people, or conflict requires a different posture. The exception may be presented with biblical citations and an urgent tone. A congregation should slow down at precisely that point. What in the text grants the exception? Does the exception apply to conduct the speaker would condemn in any other state? Have the affected people been permitted to speak as witnesses to their own lives? A church that asks these questions is not placing an external morality over Scripture. It is refusing to let an interpreter quietly suspend the scriptural demands he claims to honor.

Those questions can be abused too. One person may suspect that any defense of Jewish history hides contempt for Palestinians. Another may hear any criticism of Israeli policy as a hidden accusation against Jews. The congregation needs words precise enough to protect people from both harms. It can insist that Jewish people are not collectively responsible for a state’s acts, that antisemitic claims about hidden control and collective guilt are excluded, and that Jewish fear must be heard. It can equally insist that Palestinians

are not a faceless problem for prophecy, that Christians among them can speak as fellow readers of Scripture, and that scrutiny of state policy remains legitimate. A person who violates one rule cannot claim the other rule cancels it. The same standard of human dignity governs both.

Chapter 10 named a serious failure by a critic whose biblical work I have used. The practical consequence here is that a study group should never build its entire case on the stature of one critic. If a source makes a claim about a person, the group checks the source and the claim. If the author's own conduct later undermines trust in another area, the group examines the relevance of that conduct without pretending a disputed verse has answered itself. It can withdraw an endorsement, retain an independently sound argument, and tell the congregation why those decisions differ. A reliable process is more durable than a succession of heroes.

Chapter 14 of the Didache connects the gathered meal with confession and reconciliation. I do not claim a modern investigation can be completed with a mutual apology before worship. Sometimes the harm is so serious that independent reporting, civil authorities, or a lengthy process is necessary. Yet the ancient instruction exposes a gap in churches that demand repentance in private while leaving a public teaching uncorrected. If the pastor told the congregation that a video portrayed an event in Gaza and later learned that it showed a different event, he should correct the date and the location in the same setting where the error was spread. A quiet note to the member who first challenged it does not repair the public claim. If the error involved an Israeli casualty or a Palestinian casualty, the duty is the same.

The correction can be brief and exact. "Last week I said this photograph was from this place. It was not. Here is what I now know, and here is what I do not know. I withdraw the conclusion I drew from it." A leader may worry that the sentence will weaken confidence. It may instead teach that the church values truth beyond the leader's prestige. People can survive the loss of a dramatic illustration. It is harder for them to recover from learning that a minister knew an error and kept it because the error helped the sermon.

There should be a modest way for an ordinary member to begin that correction. A church can identify two or three leaders who will receive a factual concern, provide the original speaker with the concern and source, set a reasonable time for an answer, and protect the person who asked from retaliation. The process should not require the member to publish a hostile accusation online before anyone will listen. Nor should it require her to accept a private assurance that cannot be checked. Written records protect the questioner and the leader from a dispute conducted entirely through rumors. They allow the congregation to learn from a correction instead of reliving it at the next controversy.

The power imbalance matters. A member who has taught a children's class for years may hesitate to question a charismatic pastor. A person whose family relies on the church for rides or food may be even less willing. "Anyone may ask" is a weak promise if asking costs one's place in the community. The Didache's call to test teachers assigns a task to the body. It cannot be delegated to the person most able to endure a loss of belonging. Leaders should say publicly that disagreement over an interpretation is not grounds for exclusion from fellowship and make that promise effective when a particular critic becomes inconvenient.

There is a different misuse of the testing language: treating a distressed person as a false prophet because her words are not orderly. Someone describing a relative killed in war may make a factual mistake. The church can check the mistake without turning the person into an object lesson. A grieving mother does not have the same role as a funded visiting teacher selling a public argument. The standard of factual accuracy matters in both cases; the relation of power and the appropriate response differ. Discernment includes discernment about the person to whom a rule is being applied.

The internet has multiplied teachers without multiplying opportunities to question them. A video arrives in a church group. A preacher speaks from another country while nobody in the room knows his community, accounts, or record of correction. A clip circulates without the context in which the statement was made. The Didache's visitor was embodied: someone could observe where he stayed, what he ate, whether he worked, and how he treated the poor. That old test cannot be copied onto a screen. The church can compensate by slowing the share, finding the full speech, checking the source, learning what organization produced it, and asking a local teacher willing to be accountable for recommending it. A dramatic video should never gain more authority because it arrived without a person to answer questions.

A member who receives such a video from a trusted friend may not want to challenge the friend's discernment. The church can make the task less personal by teaching a common question: "What would we need to know before we pass this on?" The answer may include the date, the original speaker, the full surrounding conversation, and a source for any image. Sometimes the video will still be useful. Sometimes the original claim will have changed by the time the clip reached the church. This small pause can prevent a correction from becoming a quarrel over loyalty. It gives the sender and the recipient a shared way to honor the truth without making either person surrender a friendship merely to investigate a fact.

Disagreement about the present war raises an additional difficulty: evidence changes. Casualty accounts are revised, legal proceedings move, official statements are contested, and people survive or die while the book is being printed. A minister cannot hold one evening's confident chronology as a timeless doctrine. The same church that keeps a roster of teachers and a ledger of gifts might maintain a small record of public claims it has checked and revised. That is not a ministry of surveillance. It is a memory for the congregation, so a disproved assertion does not reappear at the next prophecy conference as if nobody had heard the correction. A statement of uncertainty can remain on the record too. "We do not yet know" is a useful sentence when lives and reputations are involved.

I can hear the protest that all of this sounds bureaucratic. It can become bureaucratic if the procedure matters more than the truth it serves. A checklist will not produce love; a spreadsheet cannot confer courage. But a leader who refuses records because the Holy Spirit should settle everything by impression has made power less answerable. The Didache refuses that split. It makes room for prophets and expects them to be tested. It makes room for local office and asks that officers be truthful. It calls for charity and warns about financial exploitation. These are disciplines for a vulnerable living community. The purpose of a record is to keep someone with less power from being told that the community remembers the event differently than she does.

What would I want such a congregation to do after discovering that a visitor's land argument was too absolute? It need not denounce him as a fraud if he is sincerely mistaken. It should invite him to clarify and, if necessary, correct the claim for those who heard it. It could hold a reading of the relevant passages with voices capable of presenting the strongest rival interpretations. It could identify what the disagreement does and does not decide about current policy. If the church has written legislators on the basis of the overstatement, it can send a correction. That is a cost, which is precisely why the public claim should have been tested before it was sent.

If a member asks whether the congregation is still allowed to pray for Israel, the answer is yes. It is allowed and obliged to pray for Jews, Israelis, Palestinians, and all who suffer. The danger is the way "pray for Israel" can be made to carry an unstated conclusion about a state's every act, while a prayer for Palestinians is heard as betrayal. A teacher who explains what he means, distinguishes persons from governments, and

names those he had left unmentioned has done a better service than one who defends a phrase by insisting that all good Christians already know its meaning.

The last test cannot be finished in one meeting. A community learns a teacher over time. It observes whether the person who presented a neat account of the world can hear the person his account excluded. It watches whether the pastor’s tenderness in the hospital is joined to truthfulness in a public controversy. It discovers whether the visiting speaker returns an invitation when the invitation includes difficult questions. The judgment may be mixed. A person can teach a passage well and mishandle money, be kind in private and reckless on a public platform, or lead worship beautifully and preach a political conclusion without evidence. To say this is not to demand flawless teachers. It is to refuse to make one gift cancel every other obligation.

A congregation must also remember that a member is still learning while he hears. If a teacher’s claim is corrected, those who repeated it should have room to say so without being branded gullible or malicious. A past mistake can be acknowledged in public without assigning to every listener the teacher’s degree of responsibility. A person may have shared a video because the church itself gave it credibility. The church should tell that person what it now knows, offer a clear correction he can pass along, and examine why its recommendation carried the error into private conversations. In this way communal testing becomes communal care. It addresses the path a claim traveled, not merely the reputation of the one who first voiced it.

Revival would look different in a church that tested its teachers. The congregation could still sing and invite prayer at the altar. Afterward it would remember what was said, ask what is true, and correct what was wrong. It would not have to choose between openness to the Spirit and a responsibility to distinguish an inspired hope from a convenient falsehood. The Didache’s warning about a claimant who lives contrary to his teaching would cease to be a quaint detail in a classroom. It would become a shared permission to ask whether our message has made us more willing to tell the truth and share the table.

Chapter 27: A Church That Thinks Again

I have spent much of this book describing an authority that was acquired gradually and exercised in ordinary places. It lived in the space between biblical lines and printed notes, between a visiting teacher and a local pastor, between a sermon about Israel and a citizen’s decision about public policy. I cannot undo the history by announcing that my own interpretation is finally beyond criticism. That would be another way to put a second voice on the page and ask the reader to stop there. A church that thinks again must learn a practice by which it can still be surprised, corrected, and called to action after it has formed an opinion.

My proposed church is not a new denomination with a simple test of membership: disavow Scofield and agree with Tolstoy. Some Christians who defend a future role for Israel read the New Testament more carefully than many who agree with me. Some who call themselves Tolstoyan can describe the violence of governments with precision and miss cruelty close to home. I do not want a congregation built around the self-image of being on the correct side of a theological argument. I want one that can ask how a belief has trained its members to see the neighbor, and that can change its teaching when the answer is painful.

The change begins in Scripture, where disagreement should be conducted honestly. I believe that Christ gathers his people in one body and that Gentile believers are brought near to the covenants by grace, not placed beside a permanently separate people of God with an unrelated heavenly destiny. I think a rigid separation of Israel and the church cuts across that New Testament account. I do not infer from this that the Jewish people are spiritually disposable. Paul warns Gentile believers in Romans against boasting over the branches from which they draw life. Jesus, his apostles, and the first witnesses were Jews. A Christian church has no right to treat Jewish history as a discarded preface to its own story. Precisely because I reject the easy division in the prophecy chart, I must resist the older Christian contempt that sometimes accompanied the word fulfillment.

The corresponding conclusion about the modern state requires more work. No reading of Romans authorizes the murder or collective punishment of Jews. No reading of Genesis authorizes the destruction of Palestinian civilian life. A state has duties under law that are not satisfied by claiming a sacred origin, and an armed group cannot excuse an attack on civilians by describing the injustice to which it responds. The church may draw principles from its Scriptures and argue about their public applications. It should never identify an ancient promise with a blank check to a present government, or pretend that a present people’s human rights must wait for a settlement of eschatology.

I know some readers will hear a demand that their church become political every Sunday. Churches are already teaching political judgments when they attach sacred authority to a land claim, ask members to contact legislators, organize tours that present only one people’s history, or tell them that God requires a particular alliance. A decision to avoid discussing the consequences is itself a decision about what parts of that teaching may be challenged. A congregation can choose to be cautious in public policy without surrendering the ordinary work of distinguishing an interpretation from its political use. The point is to make the choices it has already made available for examination.

I imagine a church in the region where I live deciding to devote a season to such an examination. I do not describe a real congregation’s secret plan. This is a composite possibility drawn from practices and personalities I know. In the first week, people bring the Bible editions they have used. Some have an old Scofield volume; some have a modern study Bible whose notes differ; a few have no notes at all. They lay them open to the same passages. A teacher does not begin by mocking the old Bible a member inherited

from a parent. He asks who wrote each note, when it was written, and which part of the text is Scripture. The act is unglamorous. It gives people a skill that can outlast the class.

They read the promise to Abraham in Genesis and then the uses of Abraham in the Gospels and Paul. They read Romans 9 through 11 without clipping off the warning against Gentile arrogance. They read Ephesians 2 and Galatians 3 with a person assigned to present a strong alternative to the leader’s view. The leader says where he makes an inference. On a board he writes the claims that are often collapsed: what the ancient text says, what a school of interpretation concludes, what it predicts about the future, and what a citizen is being asked to support now. Nobody has to become a scholar in a month. People can see the joints in an argument before they decide whether it holds.

The class then reads the Didache as a whole. Its first chapters speak of two ways and teach love of God and neighbor, restraint of anger and desire, generosity, and the refusal of practices that destroy life. Its later chapters give rules for baptism, prayer, thanksgiving, visitors, shared material support, local leaders, confession, and readiness for the end. A member who expects an ancient church manual to consist solely of a doctrinal statement discovers an account of eating and sharing. Another who wants to place the church beyond every institution discovers appointments, communal boundaries, and correction. The text is small enough to read aloud, but its parts do not fit into the comfortable division between an ethical Tolstoy and a prophetic Scofield. Both must be questioned in its company.

Tolstoy enters the discussion as a critic who can speak sharply to a church that has grown used to avoiding the commands of Jesus. A member reads his account of Christianity as a way of life and his indictment of religious approval for violence. The room may resist his language. A person who has loved a soldier, feared an attack, or worked in law enforcement will ask what nonresistance demands in the presence of an immediate threat. The class should not scold the question away. Tolstoy’s conviction is radical, and a Christian who accepts his judgment about violence must face its hardest cases. I agree with him that the church must not bless war as though the name of God turned killing into worship. I do not need to pretend that his view settles every responsibility of protection before it can expose the ease with which Christians sanctify force.

Another member notices what Tolstoy tended to minimize in the Didache. This ancient text does not present moral conduct as an alternative to a worshiping people. It gives words for prayer and thanksgiving, describes baptism, honors servants of the community, and ends in apocalyptic expectation. The discussion becomes better because the critic of Scofield is also open to correction. If Tolstoy’s ethical urgency is to become a gift, it must not require that every Christian abandon Christ’s coming, the life of prayer, or the ordinary discipline of gathering. A church may disagree with his rationalism while receiving his demand that the Sermon on the Mount be practiced. Agreement with him on this demand is substantial; it is not a claim that every selection he made was right.

The study moves from these texts to the people who read them in different places. A Palestinian Christian’s public sermon or letter is placed on the table as Christian testimony, not an illustration of somebody else’s theory. A Jewish writer’s account of historical persecution and the fear after October 7 is read as the speech of a person, not as a government press release. Israeli and Palestinian accounts of civilian lives are checked for provenance and date. An American church can disagree with their political judgments. It should learn to tell each person’s claim in terms the person would recognize before announcing a rebuttal. That basic fairness is often missing when a preacher uses a distant life to confirm a ready conclusion.

I would be especially attentive to the room after such an evening. A member who has believed for decades that criticism of Israeli policy must be hatred of Jews may feel as if a moral protection has been removed.

Another who has watched Palestinian suffering ignored may regard the very pace of discussion as an excuse for continued neglect. The pastor’s task is not to distribute equal feelings of comfort. He can distinguish a right to speak from a right to have an unsupported claim repeated. He can tell the first member that concern for Jewish neighbors remains obligatory and the second that urgency does not permit a conspiracy accusation. Neither person should be asked to stop grieving in order to keep the room pleasant.

The test becomes more difficult when the congregation looks at its own record. What did it teach about Palestinians over the past decade? Were they ever named except as a problem on a map? Did its sermons speak of all Jewish people as if they agreed with one government? Did a visiting speaker solicit money or political support on the basis of a claim that was never checked? Did the congregation send letters endorsing policies whose likely effects it did not investigate? A church has minutes, bulletins, recordings, and members’ memories. It can examine them with the same fairness it asks of others. It should distinguish a dated statement from a later recollection and avoid assigning motives it cannot know. But it can still name the practical result of repeated silence or repeated one-sided advocacy.

There is no value in a confession that cannot say what it confesses. “We have sometimes been insensitive” might be true and too small. If the church claimed a biblical warrant for unlimited support of a state’s use of force, it should say that it made the claim and why it no longer regards the warrant as sound. If it passed along false evidence, it should identify and withdraw it. If it ignored Palestinian Christian appeals while calling its teaching a defense of Christian interests, it should admit the omission. A public correction need not pretend that the whole congregation is guilty of every act done by one leader. It should describe the decisions that were actually made and who is responsible for repairing them.

Repair has a material aspect. The church can review the organizations it has supported and the people it has invited. It can broaden its sources of testimony and its aid while keeping its financial review careful. It can ask members who advocate publicly to state their case without invoking God’s authority for a disputed policy conclusion. It can support food, medical care, shelter, and the safety of hostages and civilians through reliable channels. It can ask elected officials for concrete protections rather than recite an ancient promise as if that were a substitute for governing. These acts are limited. Their limits should not be used as a reason to do nothing.

Tolstoy might regard much of this as too modest. He pressed for a more radical refusal to cooperate with the machinery of violence. I feel the force of that challenge. It prevents the comfortable church from congratulating itself for a small donation while it continues to bless a war. Yet a congregation also contains people with different judgments about a state’s duties, immediate protection, and the means of ending violence. It may not reach Tolstoy’s conclusion unanimously. It can still agree to stop treating civilian death as a necessary stage of a holy narrative, to demand a truthful account of military action, and to withhold spiritual immunity from officials. The shared discipline is real even where the proposed policy differs.

Suppose someone asks Tolstoy’s hardest practical question in a more immediate form: If a person is being attacked in front of me, may I use force to stop the attacker? An honest congregation would not answer by assigning everyone who asks to the violent side. It could let a committed pacifist explain what protection without killing might require, and let a person who believes force can be justified explain the limits he would impose. Each should be required to take the vulnerable person seriously, including the attacker’s human dignity without surrendering the victim to him. A conclusion about defense in that room will not settle the lawfulness or wisdom of a distant military campaign. It can expose how carelessly the language of defense is stretched to cover acts that harm people who posed no immediate threat. It can also prevent an

abstract nonviolence from ignoring people who are asking for protection now. I want the moral unease to remain visible where certainty has tended to conceal it.

The public work will likewise involve disagreements that cannot be solved by invoking humanitarian language. One member may support withholding a particular category of military aid. Another may fear that withholding it will make civilians on the other side less safe. A third may propose funding hospitals or reconstruction while doubting the first two proposals. The group can compare the predicted effects, the available evidence, the legal constraints, and the people who would bear the cost if a prediction is wrong. It can make a collective statement when a judgment is both well grounded and within its actual agreement. When it cannot, its members can still act individually without the pastor proclaiming that one disputed instrument is the only Christian position. The congregation’s common commitment is to protect the neighbor from being erased by the argument over means.

Some will say the church ought to be a refuge from politics. I agree that it should be a refuge for a person exhausted by public noise. Refuge does not mean that the room protects every accepted falsehood. The prophets’ concern for justice, Jesus’ command to love enemies, and the Didache’s warnings about greed and false teaching do not stop at the door of an election. A pastor can give a frightened person a place to pray without turning worship into a campaign rally. The leader can also tell the truth when an organization seeks the church’s endorsement. The difficulty of doing both is a reason to form trustworthy leadership, not a reason to abandon either task.

A revival of practice would alter the order of the service less than people expect and the order of judgment more than they expect. The congregation can still sing its familiar hymns. It can still pray for healing, salvation, and a loved one who has not come home. The sermon can still sound like preaching rather than a seminar. What changes is the license to leap from a verse to a public demand without showing the steps, and the freedom to use a strong feeling as proof that the demand is right. The Holy Spirit need not be invoked to protect a teacher from a fact. If the Spirit leads into truth, a correction need not be experienced as an interruption of revival.

I would not make the end of one class into a test of instant transformation. People who formed a belief over decades do not surrender it because a new speaker offers an arresting quotation. Nor should they. A church that thinks again may first learn to ask one better question. It may learn that a Palestinian Christian exists where the map showed only a prophetic territory. It may learn that a Jewish neighbor can disagree with a government and that an evangelical Christian can oppose a bombing without denying Israel’s existence. It may learn that opposing antisemitism and opposing the killing of Palestinians belong to the same moral discipline. Those changes will alter later arguments even when no one announces a conversion on the evening they occur.

The church’s children will inherit its habits of attention. If adults present every historical event as a sign with a predetermined meaning, children learn to scan catastrophe for confirmation. If adults say, “We were wrong about this date or this claim, and the people involved matter more than our prediction,” children learn that fidelity can survive revision. I would rather hand them the second habit. They will face wars and disputes that none of our charts anticipate. A practice of truthful correction gives them a better tool than confidence borrowed from the last dramatic speaker.

I do not intend to reduce salvation to responsible information processing. I have been a scientist and have known the limits of a model. I am also a Christian who prays. There are encounters with grace that cannot be tallied in a source list. A person may come to the altar under a burden the congregation does not know and leave able to bear another day. That good is real. The mistake is to infer from it that everything taught

on the same evening came from God. Spiritual help and human error can share a room. The church's maturity is seen in its ability to thank God for the help while identifying and correcting the error.

The Didache ends by warning its community to keep ready. Its last chapter includes false prophets, increasing hatred, and the coming of the Lord. It does not teach its hearers to assemble a modern timetable and regard hatred as useful evidence that the timetable is working. It calls them to endurance and vigilance within the Way they have just been taught. I read its expectation differently from Tolstoy's reduced eschatology and differently from Scofield's sequence of dispensations. The fact that I cannot specify the hour of the Lord's coming makes the present demand clearer, not weaker. The church can be watchful without explaining away the person in front of it.

One objection remains that deserves respect. A reader may say that I have made an interpretive move of my own, taking an ancient teaching about a community's life and applying it to a modern state, a modern war, and a modern church. I have. I cannot make the application disappear by speaking modestly. It must be tested. The moral commands, communal procedures, and hope of the Didache are ancient; the present facts are not. The chain between them needs argument, and an honest reader may find one step weak. I ask that the same standard be applied to the journey from Scofield's note to an American policy. Neither my interpretation nor his should be confused with the verse itself. Both have consequences worth examining.

There is a reason this book speaks so often of partial blame. A doctrine cannot fire a weapon, order a siege, or make a diplomatic decision. Human beings and institutions do those things within histories of power that no one commentary can explain. But teaching can alter what citizens excuse, what they demand from leaders, and whose suffering they recognize. To say that Christian Zionist teaching has contributed to political permission is not to calculate a precise percentage of responsibility for Gaza. It is to identify one strand in the public fabric and ask the Christians who have woven it whether they will keep weaving it. I include myself among people whose understanding was formed in churches and whose obligations began before I knew all the history.

I do not expect everyone to share my conclusion that Scofield's system is wrong. I expect a church to understand the system well enough to know what it is defending, read the alternatives fairly, and separate that question from the rights of civilians. I expect it to admit when its "support for Israel" has meant something more specific than a prayer for the safety of Jewish people. I expect it to hear the Christian communities of the land before using the words Holy Land as if the land were empty of them. I expect it to ask whether the gospel's enemies are people to be loved even when the congregation fears them. These expectations are severe. They follow from the claims the church already makes about Jesus.

My last church belonged to the Holiness movement. I cannot make the word holiness mean withdrawal from the evidence that an endorsement has done harm. Nor can I make Pentecostal fervor mean a suspension of conscience whenever a speaker invokes the Spirit. These churches taught me things for which I remain grateful: the need for prayer, the possibility of renewal, the importance of someone coming near to a person in distress. Their failure on this question, as I understand it, was not that they lacked any capacity for love. It was that love could be kept local while the imagination of a distant people was governed by a chart. A church that thinks again will carry its best local practices into the public judgments that now bear its name.

The possible beginning is deliberately ordinary. At the next gathering a member opens a Bible and asks whether the sentence beside the verse is a note or the verse itself. Someone names a Palestinian church whose testimony the group has not read. Someone else insists that a Jewish family's grief must be included without making that family responsible for a state. A pastor checks a photograph before using it in a

sermon and withdraws an argument that depended on a false date. A treasurer explains where a gift went. They pray without asking prayer to close the question. There may be no sound in the room that anyone would call revival.

But the church’s old story about revival was incomplete if its measure was the strength of the music or the number who came forward. An awakened person can recognize an injury she once excused. An awakened community can tell a teacher he was wrong and keep him at the table while he learns to correct himself. It can make an injured neighbor visible without turning the neighbor into a prop for its righteousness. It can hope for Christ’s coming while refusing to call another family’s death the cost of a timetable. If a church begins to do those things, I will not be ashamed to say it has been revived.

Epilogue: After the Service

The closing scene is composite, as the opening scene was. I return to that church because the argument of a book can become larger and cleaner than the room where a belief is learned. In the room, people have names and obligations. A person who repeated a slogan may also be the one who brought food when somebody was sick. A question asked badly may wound someone whose fear is real. To go back after the service is to discover whether the criticism I have written can live among the people it addresses.

The music has ended. A few members talk beside the last row of chairs. Someone moves toward the kitchen with a stack of paper cups. The conversation from the sermon has survived in fragments. A man says he has always understood the land promise one way and is not ready to surrender it because of a single class. A woman says she had never known there were Palestinian Christians. Another remembers a friend in Israel who spent a night afraid for her children. None has come to deliver the final answer. All are describing a life that the evening's broad phrases had compressed.

I want to correct a sentence that was spoken confidently, but I also know the temptation to perform my correction. I could make the doorway into my own pulpit and leave pleased with my courage. Instead I ask what the speaker meant when he said a Christian had to support Israel. He says he meant that Jews must be safe. I tell him I agree, and ask whether his sentence would also require him to endorse a government policy after learning that it harmed civilians. He pauses. The pause does not make us allies in every argument. It gives the sentence enough room to be examined.

In the kitchen, the cups have been gathered, and somebody notices there is food left. A member asks whether it can be taken to a person who was absent. The question sounds like a small domestic detail after the scale of Gaza, Tolstoy, and the history of the Scofield Bible. I think about the grandmother's table as a theological image from my earlier writing. A table can teach a person to remember the absent; it can also teach a family to count only its own. Here an ordinary choice is being made. I hope the food goes to the person who needs it. I hope the church also learns to ask why some absences have not troubled it before.

There is a Bible on one of the chairs, its pages edged with use. I would not take it from its owner or ask him to forget the people who first helped him read it. I would ask him to look at the margin as a human place. A note was written by a person in a time and a tradition. The text beside it can be read again. A church that has let the note settle a public question can revisit the question without surrendering the Scriptures. That is more work than the little sentence "The Bible says" would suggest, and it may be an act of faithfulness.

Tolstoy would ask what happens when the pages are closed. Did we decline to bless violence, or did we only enjoy a discussion about nonviolence? Did we feed somebody, speak truth to a ruler, refuse a convenient lie, or make peace with the person whose objection embarrassed us? The Didache would add questions about prayer, baptism, teachers, gifts, reconciliation, and watchfulness. Scofield's notes would ask to be read closely enough to know what we reject and what others still find persuasive. Gaza would not wait for our conversation to become flawless. These voices do not form a neat committee. Their demands meet in what we choose to do next.

I walk toward the door, where the air is colder than it looked through the glass. I cannot claim that a church in Kansas has changed a distant war because a few people remained to talk. I can say that the old way of making a people invisible has been interrupted. Someone will go home and read the Didache. Someone may read Scofield's note again and hold to it. Someone may call a relative, check a source, or refuse the easy accusation against a whole people. The smallest alteration has no guaranteed future. It is still an alteration.

At the beginning I described the “Jesus face,” a look of piety that can sometimes end thought just when thought is needed. I cannot claim immunity to the same temptation. A serious face is no safeguard. A writer can adopt the expression of moral certainty and make another person’s life an exhibit. The answer is not to replace one face with a sterner one. It is to keep looking, to let a living neighbor be more than an example, and to allow correction to reach me as well as the people I criticize.

I think, too, about the word apocalypse. It can mean the unveiling of what was hidden. A church trained to listen for a sequence—a nation, a war, a tribulation, an escape—may be ready for another kind of unveiling. This evening the neighbor reduced to a sign has a name. The teacher treated as a source of certainty can be asked a question. A familiar passage can be read past its margin. The revelation does not make history simple or give me a clean conscience. It denies me the comfort of saying that the people in the room, or the people beyond it, were never brought into view.

The light over the church door falls onto the pavement. Behind me, the people who stayed are finishing the work of putting the room back. Tomorrow they may disagree as fiercely as ever. They may also remember the question that took longer than the song. They wanted revival. I know why. I want a revival that can bear the weight of the truth after the service, when there is no music to carry us and someone is waiting for a place at the table.

Appendix A: A Chronology of Texts, Reception, and Politics

The dates in this chronology identify different kinds of events: the composition or copying of a text, its modern publication, the circulation of an interpretation, and a later political action. Their order does not by itself prove that one caused the next. The *Didache* is anonymous, and its precise date, place, stages of composition, and relation to Matthew remain debated.

Late first or early second century, approximately. The *Didache*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, takes shape in an early Christian setting. Its sixteen chapters move from the Two Ways of life and death through baptism, fasting, prayer, thanksgiving, traveling teachers, local ministers, and watchfulness for the Lord's coming. The title is an ancient attribution of teaching, not documentary proof that the Twelve wrote the surviving text.

1056. A scribe named Leon completes the Greek codex now called *Codex Hierosolymitanus* (Jerusalem Patriarchate MS 54). It eventually preserves the only complete surviving Greek witness to the *Didache*. The date is the copying of this manuscript, not the date of the ancient work.

1873. Philotheos Bryennios finds or identifies the codex in the library of the Jerusalem Monastery of the Holy Sepulchre's dependency in Constantinople. He publishes the Clementine letters from it first.

1883. Bryennios publishes the Greek text of the *Didache* with an introduction and notes in Constantinople. This first modern edition sets off translations and debate. Tolstoy's later preface compresses the chronology by calling 1883 the discovery year; it is the year of publication.

1884–1885. Russian translations appear, including Konstantin Popov's version. Tolstoy encounters the text in January 1885, using Greek as well as Russian and German editions, and works on a version for ordinary readers. His preface and postscript place the moral teaching of the opening five chapters at the center. His manuscript history also shows work with the full sixteen-chapter text.

May 24, 1885. Tolstoy's translation with his preface and postscript appears without his name in *Detskaia pomoshch* (*Children's Aid*), no. 8. The archival commentary records his concern after publication about wording he had not expected to see in print. In 1905 he prepares another preface. The 1885 work is a reception and interpretation of a text recovered by Bryennios, not Tolstoy's discovery of the manuscript.

1894. Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* appears in English translation. It develops his challenge to the church's sanction of war, coercion, and state power. Its full argument is Tolstoy's, not a statement made by the author of the *Didache*.

1909. Oxford University Press's American branch publishes the first *Scofield Reference Bible*, placing topical references, headings, and interpretive notes beside the King James biblical text. The 1909 and 1917 editions should be distinguished when assigning an exact sentence to Scofield's published apparatus.

1917. The *New and Improved Edition* of the *Scofield Reference Bible* appears. The notes examined here at Genesis 15:18, Romans 11:1, Ephesians 3:6, and 1 Thessalonians 4:17 are cited to this edition. Scofield does not invent the entire dispensational tradition; the edition becomes an influential vehicle for it.

1924–1930. Dallas Theological Seminary is founded in 1924 within a dispensational evangelical world. An Oxford retrospective reports cumulative sales of a million copies of the reference Bible by 1930. Sales indicate distribution, not the convictions of every reader.

May 14, 1948. The United States, under President Harry S. Truman, recognizes the provisional government of Israel as the de facto authority of the new state. The documented diplomatic history has many actors and

pressures. This event is neither a fulfillment proved by a Scofield note nor evidence that one alleged private patron controlled Truman.

2006. Christians United for Israel organizes as a national Christian Zionist advocacy network. Its own mission and policy statements document an explicit move from religious conviction to political action; they do not establish that every evangelical or Pentecostal congregation joins it.

2009. Palestinian Christian leaders publish *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth*, articulating a Christian witness under occupation and challenging theological justifications for dispossession. It is a public statement by its signers, not a plebiscite of all Palestinian Christians.

October–December 2023. The Hamas attacks of October 7, including the killing of civilians and hostage-taking, are followed by Israel's war in Gaza and an enormous civilian catastrophe. On December 23, the Rev. Munther Isaac preaches his Bethlehem sermon *Christ in the Rubble*. His witness belongs to the record of Palestinian Christian speech, not an invented representative character.

2024. The International Court of Justice indicates provisional measures in South Africa's Genocide Convention case against Israel on January 26, March 28, and May 24. On November 21 the International Criminal Court issues warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant alleging war crimes and crimes against humanity. Different courts, procedures, and legal questions are involved; neither event is a criminal conviction for genocide.

September 16, 2025. The United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry states its conclusion that Israel has committed genocide in the Gaza Strip. Israel disputes the accusation. The commission's conclusion is an attributed investigative finding; it is not a final merits judgment of the ICJ.

September 2026. This book's present-tense descriptions of legal proceedings and the humanitarian situation have an evidence cutoff in September 2026. A future edition should check subsequent events, decisions, and reporting before retaining those descriptions unchanged.

Appendix B: Texts in Conversation

These are close-reading prompts, not a parallel canon. The *Didache* is an early Christian witness outside the New Testament. Tolstoy interpreted it in 1885 and developed a wider moral philosophy in other works. Scofield arranged biblical passages within a twentieth-century study Bible. The descriptions below are brief paraphrases; their proximity on the page does not make the authors contemporaries or imply that Tolstoy and Scofield read one another. Biblical passages are identified by book and verse so a reader can test the claims in a complete translation and its context.

1. The Way of Life: Didache *1 and Matthew 5:38–48. The* Didache *opens with love of God and neighbor, then gives an enemy-love teaching close to material in the Sermon on the Mount: blessing, prayer for persecutors, refusal to retaliate, and generosity. Matthew places enemy-love within Jesus' contrast between received instruction and his own commands. Tolstoy treats this as a live command rather than an admirable ideal suspended by ordinary politics. Whether the* Didache* directly used Matthew, shared earlier teaching, or underwent revision is a historical question, not something the verbal overlap alone settles.

2. The path from anger to harm: Didache *2–3 and Matthew 5:21–22. The* Didache* forbids murder and also warns against anger and contentiousness as steps toward it. Matthew's Jesus presses the commandment beyond the physical act toward the interior and relational roots of violence. This moral sequence supports the author's demand that a church examine speech and desire, while neither text by itself provides a modern law of war.

3. Giving and the limits of romantic memory: Didache *1:5–6; 4:5–8.** The manual joins generosity with discernment about receiving, tells members to share rather than cling to possessions, and refuses a piety of closed hands. Tolstoy's postscript reads the first chapter as a demand for universal love and giving. The text can illuminate a household table, but a modern household memory is an analogy, not evidence that first-century Christian meals were identical to one family's Sunday dinners.

4. Teachers, correction, and labor: Didache *4 and 11–13.** The manual asks hearers to honor teachers while also testing itinerants: a guest who stays too long, demands money, or fails to practice what is taught may reveal a false prophet. These rules resist the claim that early Christian life had no authority or no suspicion of exploitation. They also keep a present-day critic from treating every charismatic leader as fraudulent without evidence about that person.

5. Baptism, fasting, and prayer: Didache *7–8 and Matthew 6:5–18; 28:19. The* Didache *specifies baptism in the threefold name, permits alternatives when running water is unavailable, sets a pattern of fasting, and gives the Lord's Prayer for repeated use. Matthew contains the prayer, fasting instruction, and baptismal commission in their own settings. Tolstoy's focus on the first five chapters leaves this ritual and devotional material less central in his account of essentials. The* Didache* itself does not confine Christian life to private ethics.

6. Thanksgiving and the gathered church: Didache *9–10 and 14.** Prayers over cup and broken bread give thanks and ask that the scattered church be gathered; the Lord's Day meeting includes breaking bread, thanksgiving, confession, and reconciliation. One may debate the relation of these prayers to later eucharistic liturgies. Their presence is not debatable. Tolstoy's dislike of later sacramental claims should not erase what this early manual actually instructs its communities to do.

7. Local ministry and mutual judgment: Didache *15.** Communities appoint bishops and deacons who are worthy, gentle, truthful, and tested, and they correct one another peaceably. The vocabulary must not be projected unchanged onto a later ecclesiastical hierarchy. It nevertheless complicates the claim that all office or organized discernment is a betrayal of primitive Christian life. The book's constructive argument asks how authority could remain accountable to practice.

8. Watchfulness and the end: Didache *16; Matthew 24. The* Didache *ends with vigilance, warning against deception, a period of trial, signs, and the coming of the Lord. Tolstoy regarded the final chapters as concerning community arrangement and treated the opening moral instruction as enough for salvation. He thus did not make this apocalyptic chapter govern his program. The ancient text's expectation of the end, however, is real; one cannot recruit the* Didache* as though it were simply anti-apocalyptic.

9. Abraham's descendants: Genesis 12:1–3; 15:18; Galatians 3:6–29. Genesis speaks of Abram's descendants, land, and blessing reaching all families. Galatians argues that those belonging to Christ are Abraham's offspring and heirs according to promise. The author reads the latter as a decisive expansion of belonging. Scofield's 1917 Genesis 15:18 note itself distinguishes natural Hebrew descendants, spiritual descendants of faith from Jews and Gentiles, and Ishmael's line, while anticipating Israel's future restoration. A fair disagreement concerns his arrangement of these categories and promises, not a claim that he never noticed Gentile inclusion.

10. One body: Ephesians 2:11–22; 3:6 and Scofield's Ephesians 3:6 note. Ephesians describes the end of hostility and the incorporation of Gentiles as fellow heirs and members of one body. Scofield's 1917 note also explicitly says Jew and Gentile are brought together in the church; it identifies this body as a new thing not previously disclosed in the Old Testament. The conflict is over whether the distinct prophetic and national destiny he assigns to Israel remains compatible with the full force of that reconciliation. The note is more nuanced than the slogan that Scofield taught two ways of salvation.

11. The olive tree: Romans 9–11 and Scofield's Romans 11:1 note. Paul rejects the idea that God has rejected his people, warns Gentile Christians against arrogance, and imagines branches grafted again by mercy. Scofield's note argues that Christians inherit Abraham's spiritual blessings without inheriting what he calls distinctive Jewish national promises; he expects a future national place for Israel. The author disputes the hard division of destinations while retaining Paul's warning against contempt for Jews. Neither reading can be converted into automatic approval of a modern government's every act.

12. The meeting with Christ: 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and Scofield's 1 Thessalonians 4:17 note. Paul consoles believers about those who have died and describes the living and dead together meeting the Lord. Scofield takes the catching up as part of the first resurrection, expressly including the saved of any dispensation, and calls it the church's blessed hope. A pretribulation timeline depends on bringing this and other passages into a wider sequence. The date and moral meaning of a contemporary war are not stated in Paul's consolation.

13. Revelation's outline: Revelation 1–3; 7; 21 and Scofield's Revelation introduction and notes. Scofield calls Revelation a prophecy, reads the seven churches as phases of church history, finds the church unmentioned in chapters 5–18, and distinguishes the church from Israel in his reading of the final city and bride imagery. These are identifiable editorial moves; chapter numbers are not a plain-text command to support a state. The book tests the scheme without dismissing the biblical expectation of Christ's return.

14. Tolstoy's 1885 preface and postscript beside the whole Didache.* Tolstoy celebrates the first five chapters as simple and sufficient moral instruction, connecting them to Matthew 5–7. The manuscript and publication history shows that his translation project engaged the full text, although his frame diminished

the remaining eleven chapters. The contrast is useful precisely because Tolstoy was a selective interpreter too. His refusal to bless violence can be embraced without granting his selection final authority over baptism, communal worship, or apocalyptic hope.

15. Tolstoy's The Kingdom of God Is Within You *beside the Sermon on the Mount. The later book argues that Christian nonresistance exposes the incompatibility of Jesus' commands with a church that approves armies and state coercion. This is an extended Tolstoyan interpretation of Jesus, made in a particular Russian political and ecclesiastical context. The present author agrees that an appeal to God cannot make a church indifferent to civilians. Whether every use of protective force is excluded remains a separate moral dispute that the ancient* Didache* does not resolve for the reader.

Appendix C: Evidence Ledger

The ledger distinguishes documented fact, interpretation, and unproved claim. The distinctions apply to the author's preferred account as firmly as to claims he rejects. A judgment about complicity is an argument from teaching, institutions, public action, and foreseeable consequences; it is not the discovery of a single hidden cause.

1. The ancient text and its date

Documented: The surviving *Didache* has sixteen chapters covering ethics, worship, teachers, local ministers, and the end. Interpretation: It likely preserves material from an early Christian community, perhaps with layers and a close relationship to the Matthean tradition. Unproved: A precise apostolic author, an exact year of composition, or a claim that its title guarantees direct authorship by the Twelve. The modern translation used here should be checked against the Greek text at difficult points.

2. Bryennios and the codex

Documented: The surviving complete Greek text occurs in a codex copied in 1056, identified by Bryennios in 1873, and first published by him in 1883. Interpretation: The first printing opened a new window on early community practice. Unproved: That Tolstoy found the codex or recovered the text independently. His preface calls 1883 the discovery date; the two dates should be corrected rather than harmonized by wishful retelling.

3. Tolstoy's encounter and publication

Documented: Tolstoy worked on a translation in 1885 after consulting Greek, Russian, and German forms of the text; a version with his preface and postscript appeared unsigned in *Detskaia pomoshch* on May 24. Archival editors identify multiple manuscripts, including work with all sixteen chapters. Interpretation: He meant to make an ancient moral teaching useful to ordinary readers. Unproved: That he alone introduced the *Didache* to Russia or that the 1885 publication represented a neutral, complete scholarly reconstruction of the early church.

4. Tolstoy's selection

Documented: The 1885 preface and postscript place the opening five chapters at the center and describe the remainder chiefly as arrangements of Christian communal life. Interpretation: His moral emphasis is both powerful and selective in the face of baptism, prayer, thanksgiving, ministry, and apocalypse in the complete manual. Unproved: That the later chapters can simply be discarded as later additions; the document's compositional history remains contested. The author sides with Tolstoy's opposition to religiously sanctioned violence without treating Tolstoy as an infallible editor.

5. Tolstoy's politics and nonresistance

Documented: *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* attacks church support for war, execution, and coercive government and argues for obedience to Jesus' command of nonresistance. Interpretation: It exposes an enduring contradiction when Christian language sanctifies violence. Unproved: That Tolstoy supplied a complete practical settlement for every conflict or that the author of the *Didache* shared all of Tolstoy's positions on the state and force.

6. Didache and Matthew

Documented: Their teachings on enemy-love, prayer, fasting, and communal correction overlap. Interpretation: They can illuminate each other when read in context. Unproved: One specific direction of literary dependence merely from the overlap. Similar language may reflect shared tradition, borrowing, redaction, or a combination. The book does not turn a textual resemblance into a certainty about the whole history of either writing.

7. Early church and household analogy

Documented: The *Didache* describes meals, prayers, reception of guests, correction, and local ministry. Interpretation: The author's earlier paper uses a grandmother's Sunday table as a theological image for hospitality, memory, duty, and accountable sharing. Unproved: That all early Christians worshiped in one domestic form or that such a household image reconstructs ancient liturgy. The analogy is a moral image, not an archaeological report.

8. Scofield's editions

Documented: Oxford University Press's American branch published the first reference Bible in 1909 and its revised *New and Improved Edition* in 1917. Interpretation: The physical placement of notes next to Scripture gave his synthesis unusual convenience and authority. Unproved: That every exact 1917 wording had been present in 1909 or that every purchaser adopted the interpretive scheme.

9. What Scofield actually wrote

Documented: His 1917 Genesis 15:18 note includes natural and spiritual descendants and Ishmael; Ephesians 3:6 joins Jews and Gentiles in one church body; Romans 11:1 preserves a distinct future for national Israel; 1 Thessalonians 4:17 includes saved people of every dispensation in its account of the first resurrection. Interpretation: These concessions do not, in the author's judgment, remove the problems created by a rigid division of Israel and church and a sequenced prophetic clock. Unproved: The simpler charge that Scofield denied Gentile inclusion, taught two ways of salvation, or directly prescribed a particular twenty-first-century military policy.

10. Earlier roots and later reach

Documented: Dispensational premillennial ideas and teaching networks predate Scofield; his book and related educational channels carried a version of them widely. A publisher retrospective reported a million copies sold by 1930. Interpretation: The book helped normalize an arrangement of texts. Unproved: A numeric estimate of how many readers believed the notes or how many later voters learned their views directly from Scofield rather than other teachers.

11. Publication, money, and social ties

Documented: Gaebelein's later account names several supporters of the preparation and describes a path to Oxford through evangelical publishing contacts. A reported Lotos Club record connects Scofield and Samuel Untermyer to the same New York club. Interpretation: Publishing networks, finance, and social prestige matter to the circulation of ideas. Unproved: That Untermyer funded the notes, introduced Scofield to Oxford, wrote their theology, or secretly coordinated later policy. The identity of a Jewish lawyer cannot fill missing steps in a causal argument.

12. Abraham, the church, and the Jewish people

Documented: Genesis, Galatians, Ephesians, and Romans can be read in their full contexts; Scofield's distinctions are printed and inspectable. Interpretation: The author contends that belonging to Christ and one-body reconciliation weigh against a fixed partition of peoples and promises. Other Christian readers dispute this and offer arguments for a future national Israel. Unproved: That disagreement over a Christian interpretation cancels Jewish identity, erases Jewish suffering, or permits Christian boasting. Romans 11 prohibits that posture.

13. A rapture sequence

Documented: Paul speaks of the living and dead meeting Christ; the *Didache* ends with watchfulness and signs; Scofield gives a distinctive arrangement of prophetic books. Interpretation: A pretribulation removal and subsequent timetable are a later synthesis rather than a sequence spelled out in a single biblical paragraph. Unproved: That every Christian who hopes for Christ's coming accepts that synthesis or that any one eschatological belief determines a person's response to Gaza.

14. Local church scenes

Documented as author-supplied experience: Dr. Youvan worshiped for roughly twenty years among Pentecostal churches and most recently in a Holiness movement church in his Kansas region. Literary treatment: The unnamed scenes, conversations, recurring figures, and narrator's inward responses are composites, as the Author's Note states. Unproved: That a particular neighbor uttered a line of dialogue, that all churches shared the depicted habits, or that these scenes are a survey. The moral critique should remain possible to test without pretending the scenes are transcripts.

15. Palestinian Christian speech

Documented: *Kairos Palestine*, church statements, and Munther Isaac's public sermon are identifiable sources. Interpretation: Their absence from many American prophecy lessons narrows a church's moral imagination. Unproved: That one preacher or declaration speaks for every Palestinian Christian, or that Christians deserve more protection than their Muslim or nonreligious neighbors. Their particular voices illuminate a broader duty toward civilians.

16. Organized advocacy

Documented: Christian Zionist organizations such as CUFI publish biblical teaching, policy demands, and statements to lawmakers. Interpretation: This is a visible bridge between theological conviction and political pressure. Unproved: That every local church participates, that Scofield alone caused the advocacy, or that any particular policy vote can be assigned to one reference Bible. Public campaign evidence should be matched to the specific policy and time claimed.

17. Truman and 1948

Documented: Truman's administration recognized Israel on May 14, 1948, amid Zionist diplomacy, displacement, official disagreement, domestic politics, and presidential choice. Interpretation: Religious language may be one of several influences in the larger American setting, requiring specific evidence when attributed to a person. Unproved: A secret chain from Scofield through Untermyer to Truman. Shared membership in a club decades earlier proves none of the necessary links.

18. Gaza: fact, allegation, finding, and judgment

Documented: South Africa brought a Genocide Convention case; the ICJ ordered provisional measures but had not issued a final merits judgment at the September 2026 cutoff. The ICC issued 2024 arrest warrants alleging war crimes and crimes against humanity, not genocide convictions. A UN commission concluded in 2025 that Israel had committed genocide; Israel rejects that conclusion. Author's judgment: The author uses the word *genocide* morally and politically and attributes legal conclusions to their actual makers. Unproved by a provisional order alone: That an international court has finally adjudicated the genocide merits. Later procedural developments require a fresh check.

19. Partial Christian responsibility

Documented: One can trace a printed interpretive framework, public advocacy, sermons and organizational demands, as well as the independent decisions of state officials and armed actors. Interpretation: Repeated unconditional blessing of a government can dull attention to foreseeable civilian harm and make certain policies easier to defend. Unproved: Any precise fraction of deaths attributable to Scofield, to a denomination, or to an individual churchgoer. Direct perpetrators and decision-makers retain their distinct responsibility; Hamas's attacks on civilians and hostage-taking remain wrong.

20. What the comparison can establish

This book can compare texts, show how two influential modern readers selected and arranged them, and make a theological case for a church of hospitality, discernment, and active concern for civilians. It cannot recover every private motive, make the *Didache* a complete New Testament, or draw an unbroken line of control from one printed annotation to a later war. Its practical claim is narrower and testable: a church can examine what it teaches, what it omits, whom it hears, and what it asks government to do.

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