

# TURNING POINTS IN CHURCH HISTORY

## *Chapter 15*

### Augustine and the Fall of the Roman Empire

Risk – what a game! Got me through law school with some measure of sanity. David Bridges, Mark Stradley, and a few others were always good for a game. We had a game set up in the Board of Barristers room amidst all the books and briefs. Some might say, though I would never affirm or deny, that we even missed a class or two when the game was at its most intense.

Risk is a game of kingdoms. You get armies and begin with a base trying to take over the world. HINT: Never try to take and hold Europe. You are asking for trouble. History is replete with efforts to rule all of Europe and from there, extend an empire or kingdom throughout ancillary lands. It never seems to work, at least not for long. The greatest effort has likely been that of ancient Rome. At its peak, the Roman Empire held most of modern Europe, as well as Northern Africa and points in western Asia. But we know that didn't last.

In our gospels, we read repeatedly about the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. As the synoptic gospels tell the story of Jesus' ministry, Jesus began calling people to repent because, "the kingdom of God is near" (Mt. 3:2; Mk. 1:15).

If you were to read Matthew in Greek, and you didn't know the Greek word *basileia* (βασιλεία) when you started, you would before you ended. Matthew uses the word we translate "kingdom" 56 times! Jesus told many stories about the kingdom of heaven. He told parables about the kingdom being a treasure hidden in a field that someone would sell all to possess (Mt 13:43-45). Jesus blessed those who were persecuted for righteousness because "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:10). Jesus warned that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mt 19:24). Jesus even said that, "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:20).

In the Gospel of John, after Jesus' arrest, he was brought before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world" (Jn. 18:36).

As Jesus spoke, there was one major kingdom known to Pilate and the people. It was the Roman Empire, ruled from Rome by the Emperor, Tiberius Caesar (42BC-37AD). When Jesus died, the Roman Empire's population was in the range of 50 million people.<sup>1</sup> The followers of Jesus, standing at the foot of the cross, were merely a handful. The contrast between Rome and Jesus could not be greater.

Jesus hung on a tree with a sign nailed to his cross. The sign read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" in Aramaic (a common language of Jews), Latin (the common language of much of the Roman government) and Greek (the common language of learning and commerce) (Jn 19:19-20).

Jesus died labeled a king, but without an apparent kingdom. Our faith proclaims Jesus the "King of kings" (Rev. 17:14), but where exactly is his kingdom? When the Pharisees were peppering Jesus with questions about the kingdom of God and when it might come (the "where" question did not occur to the Pharisees. They assumed the kingdom would be an earthly one ruling from Jerusalem.), Jesus replied and answered not the "when," but the "where" question. Jesus said,

The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." (Lk 17:20-21).

If the kingdom is "in the midst" of us, is there no outward visible kingdom? We know that Jesus taught that to enter the kingdom of God, one must be "born again" (Jn 3:3). Is this strictly an inner process with no external reality?

After his resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days among his followers speaking further about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:2-4). Paul soon followed and entered synagogues "arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). Paul boldly "preached the kingdom of God" (Acts 28:31), yet the kingdom of God was "not a matter of talk" to Paul, "but of power" (1 Cor. 4:20).

As we read through the New Testament, we see the kingdom, finding birth in the lives of many who together are called the "church" or the "body of Christ." In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit descended upon the people and thousands were born again. These were not big numbers compared to the Roman Empire, but the numbers were growing daily! (Acts 2:47)

Throughout this series so far, we have extended our reading and understanding of the church past the pages of Holy Scripture and through later writings of history.

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<sup>1</sup> See generally, Scheidel, Walter, "Roman Population Size: the Logic of the Debate," Conference Proceedings "Peasants, Citizens and Soldiers," University of Leiden, June 28-30, 2007, at 4-5.

We have followed the writings of those taught by the apostles that were the “second generation” of the church. We saw the efforts of the Roman Empire and various other groups to destroy the church and the kingdom of God by torture and death. We read of groups who sought to morph the apostolic church by teaching aberrant and heretical teaching about Jesus, God, and the kingdom.

Miraculously, in the midst of these controversies and tragedies, the church continued to grow both numerically and geographically. We saw evidence of the church’s expansion as it permeated the Roman world and even beyond the reaches of the Roman Empire. By the time we reached the 300’s, the Roman Empire had reached its apex of power, both in size and reach, but not the kingdom of God! The church continued its growth, even as the Roman Empire started losing its momentum and stability. Ultimately, we saw the persecuted church become the victorious church, at least in the eyes of the world. Christianity became a legal religion after centuries of persecution. Soon thereafter, Christianity became the official state religion. Not surprisingly, things changed radically for the church.

The church lost much of the natural purifying effects of a persecuted body. When one might have to die for one’s faith, it has the equivalent function of a strainer in cooking. Just as a strainer keeps seeds and other undesirable materials out of a dish, you do not find many who are merely giving lip service to their faith when they might have to sacrifice their lives for it! But once the church became the way to social acceptability and the aid to political power, the convictions of the “believers” was not always quite the same!

We stand at our point of history and see that the Roman Empire eventually fell. Yet, we are a part of the thriving and historical body of Christ that has remained and continues to grow daily. We are remiss in our Church History Literacy if we do not take time out to study the fall of the Roman Empire and its effects on the church.

## **AUGUSTINE - BACKGROUND**

Philip Stokes has a book entitled “Philosophy ~ 100 Essential Thinkers.” Two of his choices for inclusion in that list/book are Christians. The first of the two Christians is Saint Augustine.<sup>2</sup> Augustine’s inclusion is not surprising. His life and thought are important not only for his contributions to the church and faith,

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<sup>2</sup> The second is Boethius who lived from 480 to 524. We covered him in Church History Literacy in the class, “Who is Boethius and Why Do we Care?” downloadable at [www.biblical-literacy.org](http://www.biblical-literacy.org) in the “Church History Literacy” section.

but also for the general effect he has had on Western Civilization.<sup>3</sup> We are spending two weeks of class on St. Augustine, but it would be easy to spend two months!

We know a good deal about Augustine not only from external sources, but from his own pen as well. After his conversion (generally dated c.387), Augustine wrote his *Confessions*.<sup>4</sup> The book is typically characterized as an autobiography, but in truth it is more. It is actually a collection of 12 books that are one long prayer to God. They begin with praise<sup>5</sup> and proclamation of who God is. They continue from there into Augustine's confession of his life.<sup>6</sup>

Augustine was born on November 13, 354, in the North African town of Thagaste. Today, this town is known as Souk Ahras in the Northeastern part of Algeria. The town was part of the Roman Empire and was about 300 years old when Augustine was born. Thagaste was fairly prosperous and a center for the agricultural region of that area.

Augustine's mother was a Christian woman named Monica.<sup>7</sup> His father was a pagan named Patricius (who converted to Christianity and was baptized while on his deathbed).

Augustine's family was not incredibly wealthy, but they sacrificed to enable him to get a Roman education. Augustine was 17 when his father died in 370. Prior to his father's death, Augustine had had to interrupt his education for a year because of finances. Augustine got to continue his schooling because of financial aid from

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<sup>3</sup> Jerome in the 400's would write that Augustine was the "second founder of the faith." Pope John Paul II wrote on the occasion of the 1600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Augustine's baptism that "almost all in the [Catholic] Church and in the West [Western civilization] think of themselves as [Augustine's] disciples and children."

<sup>4</sup> The quotations from Augustine's *Confessions* we are using come from John Ryan's translation, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Doubleday 1960).

<sup>5</sup> The confessions begin with the sentence, "You are great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised: great is your power and to your wisdom there is no limit" (1:1:1).

<sup>6</sup> In his introduction, Ryan characterizes the book as a three-fold confession of Augustine's sin, his faith, and of praise (Intro. at 29). Augustine decided to "bring back to mind my past foulness and the carnal corruptions" of his soul, "not because I love them, but that I may love you, my God" (2:1:1).

<sup>7</sup> Augustine actually spelled it "Monnica."

a local townsman. With the help, Augustine left Thagaste and went to Carthage for further schooling in 371 where he stretched his wings.<sup>8</sup>

In Carthage, Augustine lived a rebellious life, the seeds of which he had started as a teenager. “I was not yet in love, but I was in love with love” (3:1:1). Augustine would later write in prayer to God that, “in my youth, I burned to get my fill of hellish things... I stank in your eyes, but I was pleasing to myself and I desired to be pleasing to the eyes of men” (2:1:1). Around the age of 17 or 18, Augustine began living with a woman and had a son out of wedlock. Augustine continued to live with his “companion” for 15 years. His child Adeodatus died in 390.

Reflecting on these years of rebellion and sin, Augustine would later write that recalling them did not make his soul fearful. Rather, Augustine was confident that God had “forgiven me so many evils and so many impious works.” Augustine gave over those sins to God’s “grace” and “mercy” with confidence the sins were dissolved! (2:7:15)

Augustine studied rhetoric, which would have included an education in classics, philosophy, as well as eloquence and persuasion. Somewhere around age 18 or 19 in his “ordinary course of study,” Constantine was studying the Roman orator Cicero and developed a great desire for wisdom and philosophy. “Love of wisdom has the name philosophy<sup>9</sup> in Greek, and that book set me on fire for it” (3:5:8). Augustine turned to scripture to satisfy that desire, but was unimpressed. “It seemed to me unworthy of comparison with the nobility of Cicero’s writings” (3:5:9). Augustine later attributes his swelling pride as the reason he “turned away from [scripture’s] humble style, and [his] sharp gaze did not penetrate into its inner meaning” (3:5:9).

Augustine’s frustration with scripture came not only from the clumsiness of his Latin translation,<sup>10</sup> but also from the lifestyles of the early Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, as well as Moses and even King David. After his conversion, Augustine would reckon this experience to someone who came across a piece of armor and knowing nothing about its function, attempted to put a helmet on his

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<sup>8</sup> Away from his home and immediate surroundings, Augustine took on airs! He writes of himself as “overflowing” with “vanity, I took pride in being refined and cultured” (3:1:1).

<sup>9</sup> Philosophy comes from two Greek words that are put together meaning “lover or friend of wisdom.”

<sup>10</sup> Augustine was neither a Greek nor a Hebrew scholar. He would later question why he had “detested” the study of the Greek language as a student! (1:12:20). He was using the Latin translations of scriptures at the time. It was a few more decades before Jerome would give the church a more useful and well-written Latin version of Scriptures that we now call the Vulgate.

leg. When the helmet would not properly fit on the leg, the man might discard it as foolish and useless. But the truth is, the man just failed to grasp the importance and proper use of the armor (3:7).

For a while, Augustine fell in with a cult that used some Christian terms but was far from the faith. The group was called the “Manichees.” They believed they had some mystical knowledge that superseded the other religions of the day, echoing some Gnostic ideas we have studied in earlier classes. While Augustine thought he was receiving spiritual enlightenment and nourishment from the deceptive philosophy, he would later call it about as nourishing as food you eat in your dreams! (3:6:10)

Augustine credited his ultimate conversion and salvation to the prayers of his mother. During his time of great sin and rebellion, Augustine’s mother “wept more for me than mothers weep over their children’s dead bodies” (3:11:19). Monica had a dream where she was standing on a measuring stick (think ruler, but with the idea that it stands for scripture or “canon”). Monica is crushed with grief. She sees Augustine coming toward her smiling and joyful. Augustine asks his mother why she is crying and so upset, and she responds that her tears are because of his sinful rebellion against God and faith. In the dream, Augustine tells his mother not to worry. He stood where she did.

When Monica later recounted this dream to Augustine, Augustine “interpreted” it for her. In his pride and confidence, he explained this meant that Monica should join him in his belief system and lifestyle! Monica firmly and resolutely rebuked Augustine and said, “No!” She proclaimed that in the dream, Augustine stood where his mother was, not vice versa! It was almost nine years before Augustine would stand on the same rule as his mother, but that dream brought his mother (“that chaste, devout, and sober widow” who “watered the earth” with the many tears that “flowed down from her eyes.”) much consolation (3:11:19).

In 383, Augustine was teaching in Carthage, but was a bit fed up with the student body. Augustine decided to leave Carthage and teach at Rome. Augustine’s mother, who had never remarried after her husband’s death, was living with him at the time and begged him not to leave her. Augustine went to the boat docks to set sail, and his mother followed him trying to keep him from leaving by hugging him and not letting go. Augustine lied to his mother and told her he would not leave for a while, and once she accepted this and headed home, he hopped onto the next boat! Remembering the grief he caused his mother, Augustine would confess this sin in beautiful language:

“Thus I lied to my mother – to such a mother! - and slipped away from her. This deed also you have forgiven me in your mercy, and you

preserved me...from waters of the sea and kept me safe for the waters of your grace. For when I would be washed clean by that water, then also would be dried up those rivers flowing down from my mother's eyes, by which, before you and in my behalf, she daily watered the ground beneath her face" (5:8:15).

Augustine fell very ill in Rome and considered himself on the verge of death. Although his mother knew nothing of his condition, Augustine was convinced in his later life that the prayers of his mother are what saw him through his health crisis. Even in this health crisis, Augustine did not find God. In fact, his examinations of Scripture again left him unimpressed. He found too many areas of Scripture that were indefensible to his deft logic and philosophizing mind!

Augustine found Rome not much better than Carthage. So, when a job opening as a professor of rhetoric in the city of Milan opened up, Augustine applied! He got the job, and just one year after his arrival in Rome, Augustine moved north to Milan.

Who should greet Augustine in Milan, but the Bishop there, Ambrose!<sup>11</sup> Ambrose received Augustine "in a fatherly fashion" and Augustine "began to love him, at first not as a teacher of the truth, which I utterly despaired of finding in your Church, but as a man who was kindly disposed towards me" (5:13:23).

Augustine would listen to Ambrose's sermons, but not for content! Augustine would listen as a professional to "try out his eloquence!" Augustine wanted to know if Ambrose's preaching "came up to its reputation." It did! While Augustine remained at best uninterested, even contemptuous of Ambrose's subject matter, Augustine still hung on every word! As Augustine would later put it, "little by little I was drawing closer to you [God], although I did not know it" (5:13:23).

Augustine's conversion was not immediate. Over time, he first decided that perhaps there could be intellectual integrity in the Christian faith, that although it was not the *only* truth, perhaps it was still valid in its own way. Then, as he adjusted to this, he gradually realized that the Christian faith could not be one of many truths. He saw that if the faith were in fact true, then it was the *only* truth.

Somewhere in this time, Augustine's mother had re-found her son. She had made the hard and dangerous journey over sea to get to Milan and began living with Augustine once again. Augustine told his mother that he was no longer involved

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<sup>11</sup> If you do not have our recent lesson on Ambrose, get it and read it! Get to know the man and see the way God's tapestry is woven in and through the lives of so many!

in the cult, and while not yet a Christian, was at least going to church! Monica felt her dream was finally finding reality. Before Augustine, Monica was “calm and with a heart filled with confidence.” She told Augustine that “she believed in Christ that before she departed from this life she would see” Augustine a faithful Christian. Augustine remembered later that “this much she said to me” so calmly! Yet he knew that away from his eyes, his mother continued to pray with tears that God would speed his enlightenment of her son’s darkness.

Monica was zealous in attending church. She could see the influence Ambrose was having on her son. She heard him speak every time she could. “She would hang on [his] words.” “She loved that man as though he were an angel of God, because she had learned that through him [Augustine] had been brought...to the wavering, doubtful state in which [he] then was” (6:1:1).

Ambrose was amazed at the piety and growth that he saw in Monica. Ambrose told this to Augustine one day. Augustine had never told Ambrose that Augustine himself was not a believer. Augustine had pretended to be something he was not.

Augustine longed for a chance to have a one-on-one session with Ambrose and to discuss the spiritual questions and longing in Augustine’s heart and mind. But, the time was never there. Ambrose’s schedule really precluded much one-on-one time. So, Augustine continued to go hear Ambrose each Sunday, not really recognizing the ways he was growing and learning. Scriptures that Augustine had made fun of were becoming alive to him. For example, the Genesis creation teaching that God made man in his image was something that Augustine had mocked. Augustine thought the idea that God was confined in space, with limited hands, feet, and a head was ridiculous. Yet, through the sermons of Ambrose, Augustine first began to understand that this passage taught about the spiritual making of man. That man is made in God’s image, even though man is contained in space (6:3:4).

Augustine continued to grow through Ambrose’s teaching, but refused still to “fall headlong” and commit to the faith. Augustine first wanted to be certain of the truth of faith.

For sometime, Augustine led a life straddling the fence of morality, going to church, listening to sermons, even enjoying them, but not committing his life to God. In fact, it was during this time his longtime lover returned to Africa. Augustine found another woman to use for his lustful purposes, and refused to marry anyone, lest they get in the way of his “joyful” life of philosophy! Augustine’s soul was in torment, but God worked through his friends and job to start showing him he had not only misunderstood Scripture, but had also fallen

short as a philosopher. Augustine began to integrate the scriptural teaching he had received to the philosophy he taught and studied.

In this process, Augustine finally started growing from his pride and learning a bit of humility. He began to see Christ as not only an incredible man, but also a man of humility and virtue. From here, he began to realize the divinity of Christ. Even though Augustine would write that he was seeing only “in a glass, in a dark manner,” Augustine recognized the truth of the Christian faith. Knowing it, Augustine was still not ready to follow it!

At this point in his early 30’s, Augustine started spending time with Ambrose’s father in the faith, Simplicianus. Another Christian, Ponticianus, spent some time with Augustine and taught him about the life of St. Antony (see earlier lesson in Church History Literacy on Antony).

Augustine had a real accounting of himself and realized that he was quite a wretched man. His arguments against faith were “used up.” He was in the difficult position of knowing truth, but not embracing it. As a 32-year old man, it was tough to come to grips with accepting Jesus not only as divine, but also as Lord of his own life.

Augustine went off by himself to figure out this intense struggle and his “monstrous state” with its “shifting tides of indecision” (8:8:20 and 8:9:21). As he contemplated turning the corner and giving his life to God, his old habits and sins delayed him. “I hesitated to tear myself away, and shake myself free of them, and leap over to that place I was called to be.” His “overpowering” habits “kept saying to me, ‘Do you think you can live without them?’” (8:11:26)

In tears, Augustine picked up a Bible and turned to Romans 13. He read verses 13 and 14:

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Augustine later recounted, “No further wished I to read, nor was there need to do so. Instantly, in truth, at the end of this sentence, as if before a peaceful light streaming into my heart, all the dark shadows of doubt fled away.” Augustine went at once and told his mother. On Easter Sunday 387, Ambrose baptized Augustine.

## THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Looking back through history, we now know that these events in Augustine's life were coinciding with the last days of the Roman Empire. Different scholars date the fall of the Roman Empire at various times. We will not enter that debate here, but we will consider different historical events that, if not the key events for dating the fall, at least are significant signposts along the way! Our goal through this class is to give us insight into the fall as the Christians perceived, and to see how the church changed in the process.

During the early stages of the Empire crumbling, most church scholars would have dismissed any concept that Rome's Empire would end.<sup>12</sup> These scholars would not have necessarily considered the kingdom of God and the Roman Empire as synonymous at this time, but they were convinced that the Roman Empire was the last kingdom of men before the return of Christ. These scholars thought that Scripture, Revelation in particular, set up the kingdoms of man before the return of Christ and that the Roman kingdom was the last of these! For the Roman Empire to end must have meant the imminent return of Jesus.

Setting aside the obvious fact that these scholars were wrong, we can glean some insight to the developing views that came with the changes in the Empire itself. The ultimate sacking of Rome came in 410 A.D., but the seeds of problems had been growing for some time. In the late 1700's, Edward Gibbon produced the classic multi-volume work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. He writes in a wonderful prosaic manner about the decline and fall using various historical sources for his text. For an in-depth study of his perceptions of the numerous events and their results, one can get any number of editions of his monumental work.

For our class purposes, however, we are much more brief. We should consider several events. On July 21, 365, a violent and destructive earthquake struck the Mediterranean and much of the Roman Empire. The devastation was far and wide. People were not able to turn on the news and read about the shifting of tectonic plates in the earth's crust. They had no knowledge there were such plates

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<sup>12</sup> Most Romans would not have imagined the empire ending either! It was believed Rome was founded on April 21, 753 B.C. Of course, the Romans did not use "B.C." as a dating system at the time. The Romans dated everything from the founding of the Roman Empire. Thus, the year 410, when Rome was sacked, was considered the year 1163 AUC. "AUC" stood for *ab urba condita*, or "from the foundation of the city." Our system of dating "B.C." and "A.D." does not come about until the early 500's.

shifting!<sup>13</sup> To the people of that day, an earthquake was a visitation of some divine power.<sup>14</sup> Some of those who were Christians saw in the earthquake a divine retribution for man's sins and profligate living or perhaps the heresies that beset the church. Meanwhile, those who still held to the pagan religion saw the earthquake as a visit from the gods because the empire abandoned the temples and worship of the Roman deities in favor of the Christian faith.

This earthquake was a snapshot of what was to come. The invasions that would eventually tear the Empire beyond recognition bred some of the same responses as the earthquakes. We have several writings that give us this insight after the sacking of Rome in 410, but we should take a moment and understand some of the history that preceded the fall of Rome.

The northern frontier of the Roman Empire in Europe was bordered by what we would consider Germanic lands. The people inhabiting those lands were termed "Goths." There were those that were western Goths ("Visigoths") and those that were more eastern termed "Ostrogoths." The Goths were not "civilized city dwellers." They were more tribal in origin and lifestyle. By treaty, the Goths stayed north and east of the Danube River, which marked the border of the Roman Empire. As the 300's were drawing toward a close, however, something was happening. Some "unknown force" from further east was pushing the Ostrogoths into lands possessed by the Visigoths. The Visigoths, in turn, started crossing the Danube River and moving into Roman territory. The menace itself did not become evident until later in the 400's, when Attila brought his Huns deep into Europe.

In 376, however, with the menace unknown, the Visigoths entered Roman territory. They came over the Danube not as aggressors, but as desperate people who needed asylum. Run out of their land by some strange menace, they needed food and land for their animals. Rome responded sloppily. While at first offering asylum, certain Roman authorities ultimately incited the aliens to arms.

On August 9, 378, the Roman army met the Goths on the battlefield outside Adrianople (which is modern Edirne, in the western part of Turkey near Greece and Bulgaria). The battle was a huge loss for the Romans. Two-thirds of the

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<sup>13</sup> The Romans did not know this concept even though the word "tectonic" comes from the Greek *tekton* (τεκτων) meaning "builder" or "mason."

<sup>14</sup> History is replete with what some characterize as a "God of the gaps" theory. The theory is that when people have gaps in knowledge – where there is an event or occurrence that knowledge is not able to explain or comprehend – the tendency is to attribute the event to God, rather than to acknowledge that our understanding may not yet be great enough to explain the process or cause.

Roman army was killed, including the Emperor. The empire would never be the same. Interestingly, the invading Goths considered themselves “Christians.” Missionaries had gone forth into the Gothic lands decades earlier and converted the people.<sup>15</sup> The Goths were not “Trinitarians,” but were, by and large, Arians.<sup>16</sup>

The war lasted 4 years, but the groundwork was laid for the Goths and others to make subsequent invasions into Roman territory. As noted earlier, the incursions even reached Rome by 410. The invasion might have come sooner had the Empire not found strength and success in the emperor Theodosius. At the age of 33, he came on as a strong general who not only subdued the Goths, but also secured Goths to help serve Rome as an army buffer in the north.

Theodosius was the Roman emperor who interacted with St. Ambrose in Milan in earlier lessons. He fought hard to end the Arian heresy. Theodosius enacted a decree making Christianity the religion of the Empire, with all others than faithful Christians labeled as “madmen” or “heretics.” It was Theodosius who called the synod of Bishops to Constantinople in 381 to finally put the Arian heresy to rest and put finishing touches on the Nicene council’s explanation of the Trinity.

Had Theodosius reigned long enough, history would be dramatically different. But he died at the age of 50, leaving the Empire in the care of his two sons, Arcadius and Honorius. Neither was suited to rule, by talent or by age. Arcadius was 17; Honorius was 11!

Once Rome was sacked in 410, the people voiced multiple opinions of why their world seemed to be crumbling. Much like the earthquake 45 years earlier, the ideas fell into several camps. Some felt this was the revenge of the gods for Rome turning Christian. Some Christians felt it was the revenge of God for sin and heresy.<sup>17</sup> Others continued to preach that a Christian Empire would ultimately win out, and the people should trust in that and accept any chastisement from God.<sup>18</sup> Augustine wrote one of his seminal works at this point, *The City of God*. Augustine wrote mainly to respond to the pagan argument that Christianity had led to the fall of Rome.

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<sup>15</sup> One of the principle missionaries had been Ulfilas (c. 311-383). Ulfilas spoke Greek, Latin, and Goth. He worked among the Goths and even translated most of the Bible into the Gothic language. He did not translate the books of Samuel and Kings...the Goths really did not need more lessons in warfare!

<sup>16</sup> See the earlier lessons on the Trinity. The Arians believed Jesus was a powerful son of God, but not God himself. They believed that Jesus was one of God’s creations.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Salvian’s 440 A.D. work, *On the Divine Government*.

<sup>18</sup> See Orosius, *Seven Books Against the Pagans*, written about 417-418.

In Augustine's book, he explains that there is a kingdom of God, a kingdom of Satan, and kingdoms of men. We should never confuse those! The Kingdom of God is eternal and founded upon the faith of God's people. Augustine saw that Christians properly belonged to the City of God, his church, and his kingdom. Satan sought to destroy the church, but could never do so. The church would reign through the end of days. Augustine saw Revelation 20:3,7 with its reference to the 1,000-year reign as a symbolic time period of the age of the church.

Satan's kingdom was in constant strife with God's. Man could choose to "live" in one or the other. The kingdoms of men were not to be confused with God's kingdom. Rome was not God's city, nor was the Roman Empire the Kingdom of God. Augustine called people of faith to follow the church, not rest their faith in an earthly kingdom.

Augustine's book also emphasized that Christianity could not be blamed for the fall of Rome. Rome was an earthly kingdom like countless others. These kingdoms fell throughout history. They fell whether they were pagan or not.

Once the Roman Empire started crumbling, there were significant effects on the church both directly and through society. We will study these as we go through the Middle Ages, but we need to note several of them in this lesson. Society itself changed, of course. As the western part of the Roman Empire crumbled first, we saw blending of languages and cultures as the Germanic tribes and others started integrating into the Latin/Roman people. The Goths/Germans wore trousers; the Romans wore togas. The legal systems, the foods, the understanding of the church were all different. It took a good bit of time for the cultures and societies to settle these differences as the seeds of modern Europe are planted. The German/Gothic invaders were rural people, not city dwellers. The importance and populations of cities begin declining. Perhaps most significantly, the overall Empire government changes and local feudal lords arose. Yet, the church itself kept its worldwide character and almost "Empire-esque" form of government. The church arises in this time to take over many of the functions that the Empire had performed. The church becomes the educator of people, the church provides the sustenance of people, and the church provides ultimate authority for people.

These are subjects we will explore as we continue this class. But first, we have a few more loose ends to tie up in this 300-400 time range!

In this framework we will study more of Augustine in our next class.

## POINTS FOR HOME

1. Augustine's confession/biography begins with a Psalm of praise. What a good example for us! Psalm 7:17 – *"I will give praise to the Lord because of His righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the Lord most High."*

God is worthy of praise for the events of our lives, the events in history, and the promise of coming glory in Jesus. All else fades in comparison to the hand and work of God!

As we think of Augustine's conversion, it is also appropriate for those of us with children to be constant in our prayers for them. Pray every day for our children. It accomplishes a lot. James 5:16b – "...The prayer of a righteous man (or woman) is powerful and effective."

2. *"To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord"* (1 Tim. 1:2).

Mentor those around you. God works through who you are, what you do, and what you say. With all the amazing things Ambrose did as Bishop of Milan, standing up against Roman emperors (or his mother in one case!) when the Trinity was at stake, perhaps his most lasting work was simply mentoring the young Augustine at a time when Augustine was a fake believer.

3. *"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again* (Jn. 3:3).

Kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall – save for the Kingdom of God. It will last forever. I love America. It is my home, and it is a beacon in the world in many ways. But it is not the kingdom of God! My true citizenship, and my king are not of this world. It is why I have brothers and sisters all around this globe, and why I pray for the kingdom of God to spread and expand, in the United States and beyond!

## HOME WORK

To recap, we are memorizing 1 John this year in the English Standard Version. That amounts to two verses a week. To be current, we need to have memorized 1 John 1:1-3:1. This week we add 1 John 3:2-3:3. We provide all verses below for your help!

**1John 1:1** That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— **2** the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— **3** that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. **4** And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

**1:5** This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. **6** If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. **7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. **8** If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **10** If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

**1John 2:1** My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. **2** He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. **3** And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. **4** Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, **5** but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: **6** whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. **7** Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. **8** At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to

you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. **9** Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. **10** Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. **11** But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

**12** I am writing to you, little children,  
because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

**13** I am writing to you, fathers,  
because you know him who is from the beginning.  
I am writing to you, young men,  
because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, children,  
because you know the Father.

**14** I write to you, fathers,  
because you know him who is from the beginning.  
I write to you, young men,  
because you are strong,  
and the word of God abides in you,  
and you have overcome the evil one.

**15** Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. **16** For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. **17** And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

**18** Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. **19** They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. **20** But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. **21** I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. **22** Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. **23** No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. **24** Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. **25** And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

**26** I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. **27** But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. **28** And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. **29** you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

**1John 3:1** See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. **2** Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we

know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. **3** And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.