

# ARISE & BUILD

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## WHEN GOD HITS THE “DELETE” BUTTON ON MAN’S PRETENSIONS

BY MARK R. RUSHDOONY



Over fifty years ago when we were in high school my sister and I were discussing comments made at our Christian school favor-

ing an Arminian theology of salvation and dismissing a Reformed one. My mother summed up the reason for the different positions very succinctly when she injected, “It depends on what kind of God you believe in.”

I’ve never forgotten that comment. We can easily fall into the trap of creating our own construct of a god and falsely claim it is the God of Scripture. Making idols of wood or metal is an archaic practice to us, but we do still form false images in our mind of a god foreign to Scripture. In doing this, we are guilty of first idolatry and then blasphemy, as we ascribe God’s name to our construct.

What kind of god is it you believe in? The Bible does detail the outworking of God’s salvation, but to focus on that alone results in a man-centered view of Providence. Scripture also reveals much of God, but also reveals much of the nature of God in doing so. In the course of history God revealed His holiness and justice in many ways, not the least of which was the lesson that God would not bless even His chosen people in rebellion. He destroyed His temple, Jerusalem, and the nation itself disappeared into Babylon for decades before He raised a remnant to carry on His promised provision for

them. “God is not mocked,” Paul told the Galatian church (Gal. 6:7). One thing we must believe about God is that man’s sin will never frustrate His eternal decrees.

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### OUR CULTURE IS IN SELF-DESTRUCT MODE

I was a teenager in the 1960s, a decade that became synonymous with change. The changes of that period were a rebellion against whatever was perceived as the “norm.” We are again experiencing a period of rapid changes and uncertainty. Today’s changes are perhaps more anarchistic, irrational, and self-destructive to the point of being suicidal.

Instead of the moral rebellion of the 1960s sexual revolution, for instance, we are today seeing a rebellion against the legitimacy of gender itself. Instead of the 1960s demand that unwelcomed views be heard, we now hear shrill demands to only recognize certain views as legitimate. It was recently reported that a recent survey found 45% of responding Democrats favored forcing the unvaccinated into facilities.

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Where do you think this insanity is headed? In answering that question, we must again acknowledge, “It depends on what kind of God you believe in.” In times like these, walking by sight instead of faith in the Lord of heaven and earth will make you a pessimist in short order. Instead, we are called not just to *believe*, but to *remember*, to forge our thinking and worldview around the assurance that “I am the Lord your God.” Paul’s reminder that “our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29) was not given to make us dread the manifestations of His visitations but to a faith that His shaking of heaven and earth is so “that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb. 12:26-27).

### ESCHATOLOGY AS GOD’S ENDINGS

The word “eschatology” is a modern one from the Greek *eschaton*, meaning “the last.” The subject has been a very popular one in recent generations. Dispensationalism exploded in popularity after the creation of Israel in 1948 and dominated the content of many churches’ teachings through most of the twentieth century until its failed expectations caused it to be de-emphasized. The failure of that futurist perspective fed a reaction toward a Preterist perspective which places the fulfillment of most prophecy in the distant past.

An inherent weakness in much of the discussion of eschatology is a simplistic assumption that it refers to “*the* last things,” the final resolution of history, a single *ending* rather than the many *endings* God forces on man because He is the “Alpha and Omega” (the first and last) of heaven and earth. God has repeatedly forced an *eschaton* (ending) to man’s pretensions; He has and will hit a “delete” button on the works of man so that His Providence might progress. A Biblical eschatology must assume that God will not be mocked, that He will be vindicated. To assume this only happens at the end of history is an error.

If you had lived in the generation of Noah’s Flood you would have seen that

cataclysm as an eschatological event, an ending forced by God. Similarly, Babel was an eschatological event, when God said, “This stops now.” The drowning of Pharaoh’s army was an ending forced by God on the people that enslaved His covenant nation. The fall of Samaria to Assyria (c. 721 B.C.) and, later, the fall of Jerusalem (586 B.C.) to the Babylonians were judgments, endings to sin and rebellion which had been prophesied. Later the fall and destruction of Jerusalem (in A.D. 70) to the Romans was the end of its apostate arrogance prophesied by our Lord (Matt. 24).

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These endings controlled the course of nations and their people. History took a different path when God hit these nations’ “delete” buttons and said, “This stops now.” Every ending forced by God is an eschatological event, and Scripture is full of examples. Saul’s death was an ending that had less dramatic impact on fewer people, but it was, certainly, an ending, a judgment of God that established the throne of David. When the Assyrian King Sennacherib seemed poised to conquer Jerusalem, the angel of the Lord slew 185,000 of his soldiers,

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ending his presumption and sending him back to Nineveh never to threaten Jerusalem again. That was an end to Sennacherib's plans so that God's might proceed unimpeded. Later, during the Babylonian Captivity, Nebuchadnezzar's bout with insanity forced an end to his arrogance and the beginning of his humbling before the God of Israel. All judgments represent God's "delete" of something, its end. The judgment of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) is such an event. Later, the depraved Emperor Caligula intended to revive the Herodian monarchy and make Agrippa, who had imprisoned many Christians and executed the apostle James, a king like his grandfather Herod "the Great." This plan was prevented by Caligula's assassination and then Herod Agrippa himself died suddenly at a public event "because he gave not God the glory" (Acts 12:23). These judgments represented an ending to the Herodian presumption to a right that then belonged to the risen Christ.

Certainly, the later fall of Rome was an *eschaton*, an ending that was the subject of Daniel's prophetic interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream that the fourth kingdom (Rome) would lack the inherent strength of its predecessors and would be "broken." The Kingdom of God, however, continued because God's promise was that it would "stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44).

We should see the movements of history as the hand of God even when we do not have the testimony of Scripture as to where those endings are leading. Both prophecy and subsequent revelation lay out the meaning of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., but if we have faith in the God Who controls all of history then all things "work together for good" (Rom. 8:28), toward His appointed purposes. The defeat of Nazism and the collapse of the Soviet Union, neither of which were subjects of Biblical prophecy, were, nevertheless, endings. We can pray that more such endings to evil be forced on history by God. The end of the communist re-

gimes of China and North Korea would be a blessing to many. We can also pray for an end to the anti-Christian, liberty-hating governance that is choking the West, including the U.S. The corollary to "Thy Kingdom come" must be our desire that man's pretensions to his kingdoms be brought to naught.

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#### **JOEL'S COMMENTARY ON HIS TIMES**

Joel was a prophet to Judah. He speaks of judgment, of a coming judgment of God that would constitute a "delete" command, but it is interesting that, though the date of his writing is not certain, it was likely centuries before the predicted event [the fall of Jerusalem and the nation to Babylon in 586 B.C.]. The prophet's name means "Jehovah is God," appropriate because that is part of his theme.

The nation had been living through unprecedented events. He began (Joel 1:2-3) by asking if they had ever seen anything comparable. Had their fathers? Joel says these events will be spoken of by their grandchildren.

Joel was referring to a contemporary locust plague. Such plagues have been dreaded by agricultural societies throughout history, as they developed very suddenly, and their destruction can quickly reduce a people to starvation. The sudden and total destruction of the locust was used by Joel to illustrate "the day of the Lord" (1:15, 2:1, etc.).

The locusts are referred to as lions (1:6) which rip the flesh off their prey, as they debark the vines and fruit trees which resulted in their death. In the American West swarms of locusts were

known to have eaten linens hanging on a line to dry, so that only what was protected by the clothespin remained. In a serious locust plague, when the green vegetation is gone, the insects attack bark and any other organic material so that the destruction is total. It is such total destruction that is described by Joel. It was so devastating that joy was “withered away from the sons of men” (1:12). His point is that “the day of the Lord,” God’s “delete” button on Jerusalem and Judah, will likewise be just as complete.

Joel gives us another picture the people knew as a consequence of the locust plague, one that should make them mourn. Even the temple offerings stopped because the land had nothing to offer. The judgment Joel was referring to as “the day of the Lord” was the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C., still long in the future. At that time, the temple offerings also stopped. The cessation of temple rituals meant a break in communion with God. In Joel’s day, the locust had destroyed the production of grain, wine, and oil production. In the immediate aftermath of the locust plague, the animals would have to be butchered before they starved for lack of forage. This would have included animals used for sacrifices.

Fires are referred to (v.19) as is drought (v.20). The crops are gone (v.17), the vines have withered (v.12), the orchard trees are gone (v.19), and the animals are without feed (v.20). Joy was withered away, an apt description of man’s hopeless condition when God declares an ending, when He declares, “This stops now.”

### THE DAY OF THE LORD

Nothing like this had happened in the people’s memory or in their parents’. It would be remembered for generations. So what point was Joel making about these calamities that the elders, the priests, and the inhabitants of the land should know? It was that “the day of the Lord was at hand” (v.15). (It is worth noting that “at hand” is referring

to something that likely did not take place for three centuries.) The events they experienced, as dramatic as they were, represented only a warning, a foretaste, a reminder of the nature of the day of the Lord’s judgment.

“The day of the Lord” refers to God’s frustration of evil when He takes control of history. “The day of the Lord” occurs twenty-two times in the prophets. That number could be multiplied if we counted all the times the prophets referred to “that day,” a phrase that reoccurs in the New Testament.

The last prophetic reference to “the day of the Lord” is in the closing words of Malachi, in which the coming of Elijah before the “great and dreadful day of the Lord” is promised. Jesus made clear that was a reference to John the Baptist (Matt. 11:12-15). Now as believers we are not used to thinking of the coming of Jesus or His Kingdom as in any way “dreadful,” but that word refers to that which puts the fear of God into man. The coming of Jesus was God’s invasion of history, what men wrongly saw as their domain to control. Jesus was the ultimate disrupter of man’s pretensions. If “the day of the Lord” is God saying, “No more; things change now,” then Jesus was the ultimate reset button of history. When He came, He took control of history and established the certainty of His eternal decree. The pretensions of man, indeed of Satan himself, were destroyed. As Isaiah said,

Of the increase of his government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. (Isa. 9:7)

The incarnation of the Son of God added a dimension to covenantal history that was lacking in the nation of Israel, its shadow, or prototype. That new dimension is certain progress.

God will visit man in judgment yet again. After all, the gates of hell will

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# FAITH PRODUCES FAITHFULNESS

BY ANDREA SCHWARTZ



Like many of you, I have journeyed in my walk with Christ learning from gifted teachers and sharing in community with other believers. However, 2020 proved to be a pivotal point in recognizing that some of the categories I have placed people in were wrong.

Let me give you some examples.

When I heard that someone was homeschooling, I would immediately place that person in my good category. If I heard that someone voted for a liberal candidate, that person would not be placed in my good category. If the person looked edgy with tattoos or body piercings, I would have no problem excluding them from my good category. The same was true of those who identified with Christian denominations I felt had faulty theology.

These ideas went unchallenged until I, like many other people, began to experience the tyranny of mandates that were an overreach by our civil governments at the local, state, and federal levels. Suddenly, many of the people who I deemed kindred spirits were reacting to the situation quite differently than I. In fact, some were self-consciously asserting a Biblical justification for compliance with these mandates and their decision to obey while criticizing others who didn't agree. I couldn't help but notice, that some of the previous people or groups that would never make it on to my good list were reacting to tyrannical mandates much like I was. Suddenly, my categories were deficient and unreliable.

As a result, I found myself attending a church in my city (ground zero to statist overreach) whose doors I would normally not have entered. Yet, I found that there were many others who had been similarly drawn to this church because

it recognized in word and practice that, "We must obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29), and remained open.

For the past 15 months, I have had the opportunity to fellowship with others who valued their liberty in Christ and sought to obey the Scriptural command to not forsake meeting with the brethren (Heb. 10:25). I discovered that what united us was not doctrinal positions but the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3:17 tells us that, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." People from all sorts of backgrounds, social status, occupations, and previous church affiliations came to worship our Lord Jesus Christ, and did so with the possibility of opposition.

There is nothing like the Lord proving His point, and I have discovered that there are those who truly hunger and thirst for righteousness and appreciate a place to gather with brothers and sisters in Christ. And guess what has happened? I have witnessed that this group of people has sparked a movement that lives out the reality that faith without works is dead (James 2:17). I have seen people step up to help fund scholarships for students to attend Christian school, even if they did not know the recipient family. I have seen people organize groups to facilitate families who wish to remove their children from public schools. I have seen medical professionals willing to share their gifts and talents with people who have no other place to go for help. This very real Covid crisis has done something peaceful security had not previously produced: the Body of Christ coming together.

Almost weekly, I hear of another project designed to allow people to learn things they may not have previously known. I have witnessed new friendships develop based on a strong desire to learn and apply God's Word. In other words, I have seen *faith* produce *faithfulness*.

The blessed hope that Jesus gave His

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church right before His ascension to the right hand of the Father is that all power had been given to Him and that He would be with us as we carried out His Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). For the past three decades, I have embraced this intellectually and with faith, but it has really come to fruition during these past two years. I see the Kingdom advancing in ways that I could previously only imagine. In fact, I have said over and over again, I have seen more good fruit in the last two years than the many years I worked within denominations that shared basic doctrines that I embraced.

There are those who have been taught that things will get worse and worse and then they will be rescued away from tribulation. That is not how I read my Bible, but I can say that many of these same people live and act inconsistently with this belief and I have witnessed real future-oriented work of building the Kingdom. Sure, when in discussion we can debate these issues—often each of us assured that we are correct. But when abstraction gives way to action, we are often united in advancing the rule and reign of Jesus Christ. Together, we can embrace the words of Romans 8:35-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In looking back at the first century church, I imagine there were as many, if not more, potential squabbles than we have today. Yet, the Holy Spirit transformed these believers into those who would change the world. This confirms

for me that God's ways are not our ways and that we should expect what appears to be miraculous to us, to be how God planned it out from before the beginning.

What exactly is faithfulness? It is applying God's Word to your life as best you understand it and have opportunity to live out. The faith, on the other hand, is a gift from God as Paul describes in Ephesians 2:8,

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Those that came together with unknown ramifications did not produce the faith in themselves. That was God's gift to them which they received. *Faithfulness* is the response to that gift. I have witnessed a move into greater orthodoxy amongst many I have come to know, not because they read the right books or changed their orientation to certain schools of thought. No, I believe this has occurred because they were responding to *faith* with *faithfulness*.

At this point, some might accuse me of determining who constitutes the faithful—setting up new categories which might be as narrow as my previous ones. Our Lord, though, tells us to judge one another by our fruits (actions) in determining exactly those who love God. In fact, it goes even further when Jesus stated that those who love Him keep His commandments. What better lens to view others through than seeing those who are determined to respond to God in obedience?

I could cite many individual instances of the manifestation of faithfulness that I have observed and have been impelled to carry out myself. In some cases, this has resulted in greater community and in others a dissolving of community. The lesson I have learned is that I should plow with those who have not shied away from the task at hand and leave the outcome for those who oppose me in God's hands. That way, I focus on what I have the ability to do and operate in the jurisdiction God has given me. As

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I tell my students over and over, “There is a God and I am not He!”

Here is my challenge to those reading this, taken from Hebrews 12:1-2,

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

If the past couple of years have left you feeling that you are “stuck in the gate” ready to run but not knowing how to proceed, let me encourage you to find an opportunity to be faithful. It doesn’t have to be a huge undertaking. It might mean buying groceries for a shut in, or taking someone to an appointment, or just visiting with someone who is lonely. The beauty of reading God’s Word and prayer is that God will make His will known to you, giving you His companionship all along the way.

When we approach the Bible as God’s infallible Word, that means we must take every assertion, promise, and example as without error. When we develop such a high view of Scripture, and act upon it, we become as more than conquerors.

Could it be that the struggle for the last couple of years has been among the greatest blessings that Christianity has been given in the West for hundreds of years? Could we now be in a situation where as we converse with others (believers and nonbelievers) that we can help identify their pain and show them how belief in Jesus Christ is the path to health (of all kinds) and healing? The expression that it appears the darkest before the dawn is applicable to our day. We do not have to serve as the architects of the future. That job is taken. What we must do, and will be blessed for doing, is to be found faithful. 🙌

*M. Rushdoony, When God, cont...*

not prevail against the advance of the Kingdom. The progress has always been excruciatingly slow from the perspective of God’s people, who want to see His vindication, a total resolution before their eyes, in their timeframe. Even the martyrs in heaven cry “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:10). God’s timing is never ours. If He had resolved all things and ended history a thousand or two thousand years ago, most Christians in history would not have existed.

The coming of Jesus was dreadful to Satan, as he suffered a mortal head wound at Calvary (Gen. 3:15). One of the most magnificent lines of the Christmas carol “Joy to the World” is, “No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found.”

Some prophecies do obviously refer to particular events in history which represent a “day of the Lord,” but there are many times when God’s providential hand “deletes” those men and movements which oppose Him and allows His certain governance to direct history to the ends of His promises.

“The day of the Lord” is judgment to evildoers but deliverance to God’s people. We may go through our own plague of locusts, however. We may, like Lot, lose everything when God destroys the Sodoms around us. But we are more than ourselves as the body of Christ. We share in His ultimate victory and must therefore realize that for us every judgment of God is ultimately regenerative toward all we should desire and love. In the face of genuinely frightening times, we should join with the voices in heaven that proclaim, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

What kind of God do you believe in? 🙌

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