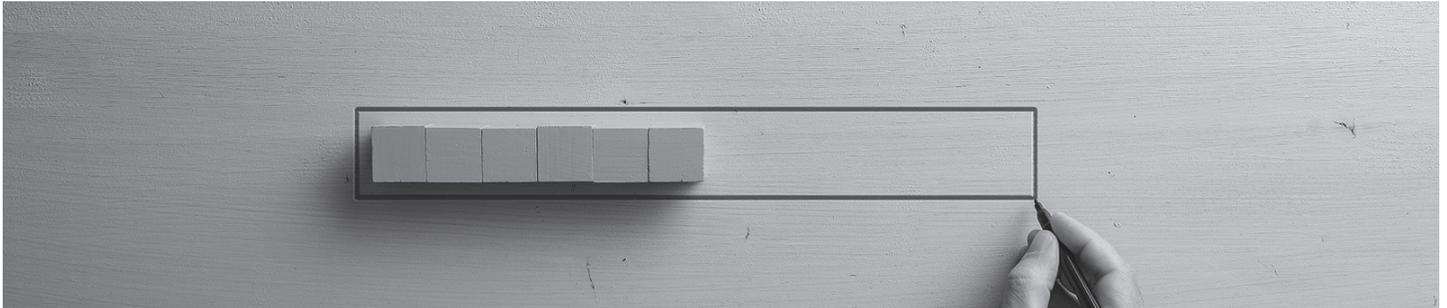


Chalcedon Report

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Shouldn't We Be Seeing Progress?

Mark R. Rushdoony

I regularly see a certain type of question on internet theological discussion groups. The question often asks something like, “If postmillennialism is true, shouldn't we see the Kingdom advance rather than evil?” The weakness of the suggestion is in the pronoun. “We” implies man's observations and evaluation as a standard for understanding the truth of God's promises. It presupposes that “we” ought to anticipate the imminent moving of the hand of God's providence.

Paul specifically admonishes us to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Our “walk” is our conduct, our deportment, which should be “by,” or in terms of, our faith. To walk “by sight” is to go about our life in terms of reason, our own evaluation. Faith is contrasted to sight because the latter is associated with what is earth-bound, so Paul had already said:

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:18)

“Swelling of the Jordan”

Years ago, my father wrote an article¹ about the entrance of the Hebrews into

the land of promise after their forty-year exile for doubting God's promise that the land was theirs. Most of those who had crossed the Red Sea on dry land forty years earlier had died; only their children, now adults, along with the two trusting spies, Joshua and Caleb, were then entering. Once again, they would do so on dry ground, this time across the Jordan riverbed with their own children (Josh. 3:1-17).

We do not think of the Jordan River as a formidable barrier, so we often miss that “the Jordan over-floweth all its banks all the time of harvest” (Josh. 3:15). This was not a fall harvest, after a dry summer, but the early barley harvest, so the river was at its spring flood stage. My father wrote:

According to Joshua 3:1-2, God required Israel to camp on the banks of the Jordan for three days before He stopped the waters and took them across on dry land. Consider that fact. For three days, all Israel had to camp near the banks of the Jordan and look at an impossible crossing. Three days gave them enough time to doubt God, to think of turning back, or to grumble at the absurdity of trusting in God. They did not doubt, and God took them across.

Perhaps you and I are now at our particular Jordan crossing. There seems to be no way through our problem, nor any safe crossing for us. All this may be the Lord's testing of our faith.

Note that the people were brought by Joshua to the Jordan, but then left there for three days before any instructions were given. That was more than “enough time” to doubt God or His provision for them. It would have been easy to do so at first sight of the river. But remember the experience of that generation. Many remembered what happened when the spies gave their negative report (Num. 13-14:39) and all knew of it. None of them, except for Joshua and Caleb, were over sixty; the senior generation had been allowed to die in the wilderness, homeless. Now they were faced by a river at flood stage. Dare they doubt like their parents?

God gave them the opportunity to “walk by sight,” and let them have a good look at an obstacle. Their advance after the crossing was to be on Jericho, yet another test of faith. But this young generation was ready to “walk by faith.” When Joshua told them they would enter the land there was a different response than that of their fathers a generation earlier:

And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go.

According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the Lord thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses.

Whosoever *he be* that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage. (Josh. 1:16-18)

Spies were sent into the land just as they had been a generation earlier. These spies to Jericho were aided in their escape by Rahab. The fact that they were reporting to Joshua, one of the faithful spies, could not have been lost on those young men. They refused to fail as Joshua's companions had previously. Their report is recorded for us:

And they said unto Joshua, Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us. (Josh. 2:24)

This was a generation of men ready to do battle if God so willed it. We are told of no doubts, no fears, and no desire to turn back. All would have been "rational," if faithless, reactions. But despite their faith, the Jordan River was still at flood stage. For three days they watched the river.

God Saves in Unexpected Ways

Scripture gives us an extensive amount of context to God's work. We call man's story "history" and usually focus on the influence of men and nations to see our human story unfold. It is natural to focus on such things, but the Bible keeps showing us a God who interrupts what we see as the "normal" expected course of history to serve His purposes.

Because we tend to see the accounts of Scripture as "Bible stories," we see them as having a plot with a beginning, middle, and an end. An obvious lesson is seen in each story as well. In their simplest rendering, unfortunately, such accounts are treated as little more than

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Aesop fables with a moral at the end of each. It is important to remember that Bible "stories" are, in fact, historical accounts. They show us how God controls history in unexpected ways. Those who, at the time, walked in terms of their "sight" were surprised when God's providence unfolded in unexpected ways. We ought to remember that not even the disciples understood the necessity for the atoning death of Jesus until after His resurrection.

Returning to the picture of the Hebrews standing before the Jordan at flood stage, we should note some of the instances where God had intervened in completely unexpected ways to that point in history, all of which had already been recorded by Moses (who had just recently died):

Noah's Flood – No person has ever seen less of a "rational" cause to walk by faith than Noah. "[T]he wickedness of man was great in the earth," and in fact, "only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). So God hit a reset button, of sorts, a recurring correction later described by the prophets as "that day" or "the day of the Lord" (as in Isa. 2:11-12).² Both the destruction of that evil generation and the salvation of a remnant (a repeated theme in Scripture) were unpredictable and unexpected, even by those who walked by faith!

The Dispersion at Babel – This was not only unexpected but also not revealed prophetically that we know of. Men were trying to create an empire complete with a monument (tower) to represent their greatness,

all in disobedience to God's instruction. It was the first *dystopia* (a "bad utopia," or a would-be utopia gone wrong). In an instant God not only stopped their work, He made their dispersion necessary.

Birth of Isaac – To anyone walking in terms of the sight of reason (including Abram and Sarah) the birth of a son at advanced age was impossible. Yet Abram was promised heirs at age 75, yet, like the Hebrews who waited for days at the Jordan, Abram waited another 25 years to see the birth of Isaac when he was 100.

Joseph saves his family – Even when he survived kidnapping and enslavement then prison after a false accusation of attempted rape, Joseph could not have imagined what he later told his brothers: "God did send me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:5). Note even the sins of the patriarchs were used by God to further covenant ends.

Deliverance from Egyptian slavery – Slaves don't walk out of servitude with their master's wealth, en masse, at their encouragement, unless, of course, God forces their hand with a series of plagues that devastated the nation. The escape from Egyptian slavery was so spectacular it is repeatedly compared to the freedom from slavery to sin our covenant salvation represents. In a single event God miraculously saved His people and judged the army of the Pharaoh that wanted to return them to servitude.

Acting in Terms of Faith Is God's Promises

When the young Hebrews stood before Jordan there was thus already a long history of God's providential care behind them. They had all eaten of the manna God provided, and they knew their forty-year delay in entering the land was due to their forebears' refusal to move forward in terms of faith in God's promises. God would allow them to see His salvation, but put them through a

test that the previous generation had failed.

Joshua and Caleb were known as the two spies who had previously counseled advance to certain victory. This time the spies to Jericho did not fail in their courage, and Joshua commanded the people to move forward. He told them the implications of the crossing of the Jordan on dry land:

And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God *is* among you, and *that* he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. (Josh. 3:10)

God would “without fail” move them forward to victory which involved, like the drowning of Pharaoh’s army, the defeat of those who stood in their way. The dispossession of these peoples is representative of the judgment on all those who now resist the advance of the Kingdom of God and His Christ.

Joshua pointed the people to the Ark of the Covenant being carried by the priests. Everyone there knew it represented the dwelling place of God amongst His people. There was no doubt that the movement of the Ark of the Covenant represented God going before the people. The people were to hold back, waiting for the priests bearing the ark to step into the river, at which time, much like the Red Sea previously, the river would stop, allowing all to pass over the Jordan on dry land.

Are We Walking by Sight?

Fear of the military opposition of the inhabitants was a perfectly reasonable response of a people only recently escaped from servitude. It would have also been a reasonable reaction of the spies who visited Jericho. The difference was that the new generation had learned to understand God’s displeasure at their parents and His power to give them victory, so they “walked” by that faith. They had grown in grace and that had turned them from complaining slaves to a readiness as an obedient people confident in the sufficiency of His strength.

Are Christians today exercising any greater faith in God than the ten doubting spies of Joshua and Caleb’s youth? Demands that we “see” God at work and sense His Kingdom’s advance suggest we are demanding to walk by sight. For much of the twentieth century Christians saw the Soviet Union as dictating history. Many preached constantly that the expanding threat of the USSR and world communism (including “Red” China) was indicative of the rapture (of saints) and the tribulation (of those left behind).

The pessimism in Christian circles was so acute few could recognize the great blessing represented by the fall of the Soviet Union. A generation later, many still whimper at the power of Russia or China, even as the former is showing its military incompetence and economic weakness and the latter’s “economic miracle,” which was a gift of the West’s policies, is now evaporating quickly. The world is changing very rapidly because God is shaking it “that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb. 12:27). But the Kingdom of God, in which our citizenship rests, is “a kingdom which cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28). Why then should Christians be pessimistic? Is not this a response of fear like that of the ten spies that won the minds of the people over the confidence Joshua and Caleb had in God’s promise? There has been great progress in some Christian camps in the last half century, but it appears to be less pronounced than the change in the Hebrews in the years after the faithless spies preached fear and doubts into the people.

The Hebrews at the Jordan were told to hold back until the priests carrying the ark of the covenant stepped into the flood waters. They waited in obedience and saw God stop the Jordan’s waters. This again is reminiscent of Moses at the Red Sea crossing, where he told the people,

Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever. (Exod. 14:13)

That “salvation of the Lord” involved the destruction of the Egyptian army which aimed to return them to slavery. Should not the collapse of the USSR and the evaporating threat of Russia and China be likewise seen as part of God’s shaking so that only His unshakable Kingdom may remain and advance? His Kingdom is now larger than ever before, and Christianity is the fastest growing religion in the world. Should not those who walk by sight “see” that historical trend?

Protestants are familiar with Paul’s declaration that “the just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11). Luther felt the words “The just shall live by faith” opened his eyes to a proper understanding of justification by grace alone received by faith. That is a valid understanding, most obviously of the latter passage, but this is also an Old Testament quote from Habakkuk 2:4,

Behold his soul *which* is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

Here the “walk” is clearly in terms of one’s faith, one’s humility because of God’s grace in their life. This must be how we comport ourselves despite the temptation to question. When the writer of Hebrews referred to the just living by faith (Heb. 10:38), he referenced some ominous and fearful events: judgment, indignation, affliction, reproaches, fiery indignation, etc.

Every generation has some very real fearful events and ours perhaps more than any in the West for some time, but our comportment should be in terms of our faith, not doubt and fear. The question is not whether we should be seeing progress in the Kingdom but rather “Shouldn’t we be moving in terms of the promises of God, fully engaged in doing the Lord’s work?”

1. R. J. Rushdoony, “Swelling of the Jordan,” in *A Word in Season*, Vol. 4 (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/Ross House Books, 2012), pp. 131-132.

2. Mark Rushdoony “The Day of the Lord and the Certainty of Justice” <https://chalcedon.edu/magazine/the-day-of-the-lord-and-the-certainty-of-justice>

Chalcedon's Resident Scholar Martin Selbrede Stands in the Gap in Mexico

An ongoing outreach to pastors in Mexico, *The Growing Kingdom* conference (scheduled for November 16-18, 2022 in Ixtlahuaca de Rayón) ran into an unexpected problem. One of the scheduled speakers, Dr. Ron Smith, pastor of The Church of the King in McAllen, Texas, was temporarily sidelined due to serious health issues. As a consequence, Chalcedon's vice-president and resident scholar, Martin Selbrede, was asked to deliver four lectures at the conference on fairly short notice. The opportunity to plant Kingdom-oriented seed with church leaders hungry for the whole counsel of God was impossible to resist – especially with a conference theme like *The Victorious Kingdom of God*.

Martin doesn't speak Spanish and the pastors didn't speak English, so the gap was bridged with some highly impressive teamwork. Martin not only had a different translator providing sentence-by-sentence translation of each of his four lectures, some of the translators had the equally difficult task of translating all of Martin's PowerPoint slides into Spanish in advance of the conference (so that the scriptural reasoning presented could be grasped and applied by the attendees). A robust question-and-answer period followed each of the 90-minute lectures to solidify the Biblical picture of the Kingdom's growth and the duties that its growth entails.

These conferences, spearheaded by Glen Dunn and his team, are on a fairly aggressive schedule (roughly three per year, each in a different region of Mexico) to reach those pastors with ears to hear. Also speaking at the conference were Dr. P. Andrew Sandlin (who is well-known to Chalcedon's audience), and Dr. Wayne Barrett, also from the United States. Ignacio Solis, a gifted Mexican scholar, was able to reach the



Martin Selbrede and four of the five translators he relied on to deliver his messages with clarity.



Caleb Dunn translates Martin's final lecture in front of the pastors in attendance.

gathered attendees without need of a translator. Each lecturer provided a distinctive emphasis in their messages, gathered attendees without need of a translator. Each lecturer provided a distinctive emphasis in their messages, making for a conference of wide scope and significant depth. If this series of conferences is any indication, God is moving in a big way in the minds

and hearts of Christians in Mexico. Aside from Martin's investment of time, Chalcedon donated thirty copies of the Spanish version of *Institutes of Biblical Law* for distribution at these conferences. You can't expect a harvest without planting the requisite seed. 🌱