

# ARISE & BUILD

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE CHALCEDON FOUNDATION | JANUARY 2019

## THE SMITHS OF ZECHARIAH

BY MARTIN G. SELBREDE



It's not without reason that R. J. Rushdoony's comments on Zech. 1:18–21 continue to speak to our era. The passage is addressed to God's embattled flock, surrounded on all sides by enemies (the "four horns" of verse 18) intent on scattering her. God's people "had begun their task of reconstruction," but "their efforts at reconstruction seemed feeble ... and they were deeply discouraged ... As they turned from one side to the other they saw only hostility" for "they were totally encircled by enemies. They were a handful, some 40,000 against millions." God acknowledges to His people that "indeed, you are surrounded by power."<sup>1</sup>

God appoints four smiths or craftsmen, viz., workers in wood, iron, and stone (rendered "carpenters" in the KJV) to fray the horns, or as Rushdoony puts it, to "dehorn every horn." Rushdoony entitled this vision "For Every Oppressor a Destroyer," summarizing it thus: "The powers are around you but God has already appointed the destroyers. Have no fear. Your task, therefore, awaits you." God has appointed the means for destroying those hostile to His Kingdom.

Rushdoony prefaces his discussion of this vision by pointing out the "two great evils that have characterized human activities in culture after culture and plague us even in the

Church." These are quietism (which degenerates into a mysticism leading to a "total withdrawal from all things") and the "kind of activism that feels a responsibility for the whole world" that amounts to playing God, requiring perpetual vigilance to prevent the world from disintegrating. Both evils involve the individual in identifying themselves as God (either in ceaseless action or in transcendent unconcern), which Rushdoony illustrates.

The activist believes "the world will not function if they do not keep up their perpetual concern, their perpetual activism. Such activism is, of course, playing at being God. It is wrong and it is foolish." We will return to this point of Rushdoony's shortly, but we must also note what other commentators have seen in this vision concerning the fraying of the horns, what W. S. Lewis calls *the peculiar nature and peculiar instrument* of God's defense against the horns:

Not other "horns" to push against these; not other men of war to overcome these; but artificers only, men of peace.<sup>2</sup>

Lewis suggests that "the best defence at that time to God's people" was to be "engaged in building," and that *this* is the appointed means for toppling all the horns of the enemy: faithfulness. In other words, not by might nor by power but by what Rushdoony elsewhere called "the spirit-filled men."<sup>3</sup>

DISCOVER MORE AT [CHALCEDON.EDU](http://CHALCEDON.EDU)

The task of building, of reconstruction, ultimately voids and breaks the power of God's enemies. The word translated "smiths," *charashim*, involves skilled work done quietly:

*charashim* ... denotes *silent thought or attention*; [in some forms] *to contrive, devise ... in silence*; hence applied as a noun to an *artificer* of any kind, and to any work which disposes to silent attention. Thus, to *potter's wares*, Lev. 6:28; Job 2:8; and in many other places. So also to *plowing*, Deut. 22:10; Prov. 20:4, which requires constant attention to make "the right-lined furrow." Let it be remembered that in ancient times *such works* were more esteemed than the useless ones we have learned to admire.<sup>4</sup>

We'll return to these points after we conduct an important survey about "the four horns" as they stand in our own era, as cultural counterfeits and falsifications of Biblical truths repackaged to appeal to so-called autonomous man. We shall then understand what the proper response to counterfeit doctrines, counterfeit confessions, counterfeit values, needs to be, Zechariah being our guide.

### **FOR EVERY BIBLICAL DOCTRINE, A HUMANISTIC COUNTERFEIT**

Because man is made in God's image, he is fiercely aware of God's claim and God's truth imprinted on his being. In his rebellion against God, unregenerate man senses all the "holes" left by the various Biblical doctrines his humanism requires him to repudiate. These holes are filled with humanistic counterparts to the truth, and the doctrines which don't have a humanistic reflection are few in number. Because modern man dwells in a "refuge of lies" (Isa. 28:15, 17) he avoids confronting Biblical truths the way Dracula avoids mirrors, for those in darkness hate the light (John 3:20). If the crooked is known by the straight, the crooked

flee from the One who makes "crooked things straight" (Isa. 42:16).

So they build a crooked world on a dark, crooked foundation, a world where they think they're not confronted by the straight and the true. Small wonder that they can be frayed and dehorned by those who merely build things straight: the light shines into the darkness and can't be conquered.

Let's examine some juxtapositions of humanistic counterfeit doctrines and the Biblical doctrine they're trying to falsify and subvert.

*Complicity* is the humanistic flipside to Biblical responsibility. An activist can stir the pot and ask of those who've not danced when he or she piped (Matt. 11:17), "how are you not complicit?" Everyone is numbered with the transgressors at the speed of a tweet: if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem (creating an instant but artificial polarization for the cause célèbre).

We are awash in the return of *blasphemy*, of self-appointed gatekeepers "that make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought" (Isa. 29:21). Offense is taken at every conceivable thing, and the allowable range of behavior is quickly turning into a straitjacket with matching muzzle. The whole world has become one giant third rail.

Psalm 119:165 informs us that "great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them," suggesting that faithful Christians *should* be immune to the cultural toxins that feed the modern doctrine of cultural blasphemy. However, even here, Christians have been drawn into fighting in Saul's armor (because if you don't, "how are you not complicit?"). Invasive ideologies in search of scapegoats respect no one, as author George R. R. Martin's frustrated comment

about Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* illustrates: "What was Aragorn's tax policy?"

In fact, the old blasphemies are the new virtues, and the old virtues are now the new blasphemies, as witnessed by Dr. Susan McClary's 1987 article, "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics during Bach Year," in which politics invades the domain of music to hijack Christian composers like Bach for Marxist ends.<sup>5</sup>

Incidentally, the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year for 2018 was the term *toxic*, while the 2016 winner was *post-truth*. The irony is evident, that a culture for which truth has been transcended or subverted is certainly a culture that traffics in toxicity at every level, in every relationship, on every issue. Falsehoods circulate in place of truths, displacing the latter. Willie Brown pointed out its inexorable nature: "In politics, a lie unanswered becomes truth within 24 hours."

At this point, things unsaid are alleged to be dog whistles, and making such accusations is a form of virtue signaling (the way that humanists "make broad their phylacteries," Matt. 23:5).

## THE CULTURAL DAMAGE INFLICTED BY COUNTERFEIT "TRUTHS"

Of course, *treason* has been redefined in terms of the state, rather than in reference to treason against God, as Dr. Rushdoony had long ago documented.<sup>6</sup> We've since lost sight of the Biblical archetype, having only known the humanistic counterfeit we've been spoon-fed for decades.

Rushdoony's *The Cure of Souls* and *The Politics of Guilt and Pity* both delineate the nature of false doctrines of atonement (various forms of self-atonement promoted within humanism). The true atonement liberates men to responsible action, but false atonements enslave men because they cannot actually atone for man's sins (real or engineered).

In humanism, it can be a sin to even exist, and humanists are not shy to propose ways for you to atone for that crime. (Sadly, the false package contaminates any kernel of truth in their original indictments, which should have been dealt with justly in terms of Biblical restitution where warranted.) Job recognized that he entered the world naked, but modern man is born loaded with guilt and wishes he were in Job's shoes. For Job, the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, but modern man holds that the state giveth and the state taketh away.

For every Biblical litmus test, there are multiple humanistic counterparts. Isaiah 8:20 might alert us that "to the law and the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them," but today's litmus tests proscribe every conceivable activity. The Bechdel-Wallace Test, which rates works of fiction as rigidly as the old motion picture code ruled on the content of film, is but one of many humanistic standards being imposed upon every corner of our society. These constitute even more horns that have arisen to cause God's people to scatter.

For the *natural use* of the body, humanism has boldly substituted and gloried in the *unnatural use* of the body, reviling St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (by implication, and often directly). Gender identity now extolls the triumph of the will, glorying in an autonomy untethered to the Creator.

Consider, too, Rushdoony's comment on the text of Daniel 9:7, where he juxtaposes Daniel's confession of "confusion of face" with humanism's opposing counterfeit doctrine:

The expression, "confusion of faces," is a significant one. It is the confession of a godly man, and the beginning of his power. Moralism is not characterized by any such recognition, but rather by a *confidence of faces*, a self-righteous-

ness which assumes that history is controlled by morality and works of morality. Thus, love is assumed to be capable of regenerating and controlling men, nations, and history.<sup>7</sup>

This *confidence of faces* reverses the object of zeal: God's people are to be consumed with zeal for the Lord's house, but humanistic social justice warriors are consumed with zeal for their empires of dirt and their towers of Babel.

Zeal is intrinsic to man (even if it has degenerated into a mere zeal for one's own comfort), but under humanism zeal is misdirected to goals consistent with the sentiment that "we have no God but Caesar." Consequently, the doctrine of infallibility is likewise counterfeited by humanism, which holds that *man* speaks the infallible word, not God.

And whereas man under God is driven by duty, man without God is driven by guilt. A host of cultural pathologies inevitably radiate from this fact, for guilty men are enslaved men.

## **FURTHER REPERCUSSIONS OF BEING FLOODED WITH COUNTERFEITS**

Humanistic counterfeits are always coercive and decrease liberty. They're otherwise unsustainable. This requires all humanists to be "sons of thunder" in principle. Unlike Christians who look for a city made without hands, humanists are focused on the city made *with hands*, which inverts the question of accountability.

If you're accountable to God under His law, most offenses and transgressions have no temporal punishment assigned to them: God judges those infractions directly, either through His providential government or at the Final Judgment.

But if you're accountable to man as the highest authority, all punishment must be immanent, must be inflicted

here and now, in this world. All scores must be settled in this life, not in some world to come. Once you legislate the terms of utopia, you must enforce the terms, and the cost is astronomic. The domain of coercion must grow without limit because utopias don't happen by chance but by force.

God's law undergirds a liberty that abides. "I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought thy precepts" (Ps. 119:45, ESV). When counterfeit doctrines prevail, however, man walks in an *ever-shrinking space* as the self-inflicted snare tightens around him. This is the curse that marks "the man who trusts in man, who makes flesh his strength" (Jer. 17:5). "Surely Thou has set them in slippery places" (Ps. 73:18) and it is equally certain that "their foot shall slip in due season (Deut. 32:35).

## **THE TRIUMPH OF THE SMITHS**

The kingdom of man is a fragile one. Apart from the internal tensions that war within it, it has another Opponent at hand. Humanists rightly fear those who build up the unshakeable Kingdom that cannot be moved (Heb. 12:28), for their kingdom, consciously built upon the sand, will fall. And all their angst and adrenaline is bent upon postponing that fall: it is humanists, not Christians, who have every reason to adopt a bunker mentality. Humanism suffers the same futility as did the fictional Grinch (who discovered he couldn't stop Christmas despite taking draconian measures to do so).

Isaiah 42:3 says of the Messiah that He will bring forth justice unto truth. Further, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged until He has set justice in the earth, and the isles shall wait for His law" (verse 4). Jesus Christ modifies Isaiah's prophecy slightly in Matt. 12:20, teaching that He shall send forth "justice to victory," where *victory* stands in for *truth*. As J. A. Alexander

observes, “the end in question is to be accomplished not by clamor, not by violence, but by the truth.”<sup>8</sup>

This fact has two aspects: how the victory is *not* to be won, and how it *will* be won. Consistent with Zech. 4:6, it will not be by clamor, let alone violence. Rather, God’s truth as lived out and witnessed by His people as they “raise up the foundations of many generations” (Isa. 58:12) will prevail. Every false counterfeit dogma (we’ve listed a few samples above) will be exposed for their fatal weakness: that “there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20) and can only blind those who cling to them.

We can fill in the blanks here and assert that all the counterfeits will be put down and replaced by their true originals: that the falsehoods only hold sway because men support them, but they are all on borrowed time with God. The truth will be triumphant over the lies, and the men of the lie incapacitate themselves, as Psalm 115:4-8 teaches:

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them. (ESV)

The four horns—the hostile powers that surround us in all direction—will be frayed by the craftsmen who work quietly in building His Kingdom of peace. “Upon all the glory shall be a defence,” we’re told in Isaiah 4:5, which is to say that our God is a strong tower for those who do His will in the earth.

We are the ones called to be the smiths of Zechariah 1:18–21, the people who, by quietly building His Kingdom in the midst of His enemies, inevitably fray the powers of cultural darkness. The “explosion of all social

lies” predicted in Isaiah 32 will follow as we’re faithful to the truth and obedient to His law.

It is men of peace, disposed to works requiring silent attention, building the foundations of many generations, who will prevail. This is *not* the quietism that Rushdoony warned against (which is disengaged from the world in mystical aloofness) nor is it the wrong-headed activism that pulls so many into its frenetic orbit.

This is what Christian reconstruction is all about: the leveling of mountains into plains (Zech. 4:7) when we use God’s plumb line to build His Kingdom straight and true (Zech. 4:10). 🏠

---

**Martin Selbrede** is the Vice-President of the Chalcedon Foundation and is the senior researcher for Chalcedon’s ongoing work of Christian scholarship, along with being the senior editor for Chalcedon’s publications.

1. Quotations taken from the second chapter of Dr. R. J. Rushdoony’s commentary on Zechariah, forthcoming.
2. Spence, H. D. M. and Joseph S. Exell, ed., *The Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), vol. 14, chapter on Zechariah by W. J. Deane and W. S. Lewis, p. 9.
3. Rushdoony, Rousas John, *Exodus* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2004), pp. 457–461.
4. Clarke, Adam, *Bible Commentary* (New York, NY: Abingdom Press, n.d.), vol. 4, p. 771.
5. <https://chalcedon.edu/magazine/the-day-the-music-died>
6. Rushdoony, Rousas John, *Deuteronomy* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2008), pp. 203–210, 253–256.
7. Rushdoony, Rousas John, *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, [1970] 2001), p. 64.
8. Alexander, Joseph Addison, *The Prophecies of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978 reprint), part 2, p. 134.

# ARE YOU PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE?

BY MARK R. RUSHDOONY



The one universal sense that comes with each New Year's Day is the passing of time. Though we are conscious of the passing of a year on a birthday or anniversary, such private remembrances give way to public acknowledgement each New Year. There is a common recognition of a change to a new calendar year. One of my earliest memories of New Year's was being shown by an older sibling that the New Year, 1961, was the same upside down as right-side up.

Part of our awareness of time is the curse. Time and age lead to the grave. We know our time on earth is short. Our preoccupation with life's activities pauses when the calendar reminds us of time's passing.

*Eschatology* is a theology of time. It is often defined as the doctrine of *end times* but I prefer my father's perspective that it is about *endings*, which emphasizes that there are many endings in history, all ordained by God. Closely related is the Scriptural expression "the day of the Lord," God's periodic interventions that destroy the presumptions of men. Our eschatology, therefore, is how we view the many *eschatons* (end points) in history. Our days are limited, but our eschatology sees them in terms of this larger perspective of what God is doing in history. Our eschatology, and its view of the working of God, will determine whether our view of future history is optimistic or pessimistic.

Because we cannot see what tomorrow brings, much less the distant

future, we naturally focus on the present. Many of our problems, whether personal, social, political, or ecclesiastical, have no easy resolution in the short term, so we have trouble being confident in a positive resolution that may not occur in our lifetime. Our distress at not being able to resolve complex problems should cause us to see that their resolution is not going to be entirely, or perhaps not even partially, of our doing.

The changes of history involve a multitude of actions. The free market offers an analogous example. In 1958 Leonard Read published an essay called "I, Pencil," which described what was involved in manufacturing a single pencil. The wood, graphite, ferrule, eraser, and paint all had their own complex supply and manufacturing process, not to mention the creation of the machinery used on the final production. Tens of thousands of individuals in many countries contributed to the production of a single pencil. In fact, Read noted, no one man could produce a single pencil. It is like that with the course of history. We cannot change the future; no one man can, so we can wrongly see it as doomed. But, if we believe God is in control of the very hairs of our head and every sparrow, we will also believe that the problems that confound us can easily see resolution, for with God nothing is impossible.

There is one cause for pessimism about the future: man, specifically his sin and the inevitability of judgment. Yet if we believe that Jesus Christ has overcome the world (or sin and death)

DISCOVER MORE AT [CHALCEDON.EDU](http://CHALCEDON.EDU)

and that He truly does possess all power in heaven and in earth, then there is a victorious future to which judgment channels man's future. Jesus even gave that future in grace a name, the Kingdom of Heaven, the most recurring theme of His ministry (previously preached by John). The older name for what Jesus called the Kingdom of Heaven was the Messianic Age, the dominion of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. If Jesus Christ conquered sin and death, then what right have we to be pessimistic?

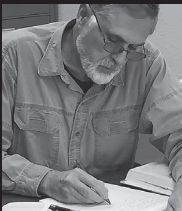
We cannot look at the past to justify a pessimistic view of the Kingdom, either. The apostles were given a seemingly impossible task of taking a message about a dead Jew, whose claims were largely dismissed by His own people, to "all nations." Yet, by the power of the Holy Spirit that Kingdom advanced and grew, a progress that has accelerated in our time. Several years ago, Christianity replaced Islam as the predominant religion of Africa. The church in China, which in my youth still met in secrecy, now includes some

sixty-seven million members, over half of which are independent Protestants. The church is also growing in Latin America and even in Islamic countries. It is easy to note that these churches often have problematic theology, but so did the early church, which spent four centuries debating the incarnation of Jesus in human flesh before [officially] settling the issue in A.D. 451 at the Council of Chalcedon. We often fail to see change when it happens. When the USSR collapsed in the late 1980s, there was hesitancy in the conservative movement to believe it was real. Many suggested it was a ruse to catch us off guard.

The Kingdom will advance because its power is of the Spirit, and not limited by our vision. Our Lord is not going to fail. The future is His. "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end . . . the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (Isa. 9:7).

Why, then, should any believer in Jesus Christ be pessimistic about the future of His Kingdom? 🙏

## SUPPORT A LONG-TERM MINISTRY, FIGHTING A LONG-TERM BATTLE IN SERVICE OF A LONG-TERM VISION.



Since 1965, the Chalcedon Foundation has served as the founding and leading ministry for the message

of Christian Reconstruction, which is simply the mission of advancing the Kingdom of God in every area of life.

Our objective is to help equip Christians to "take back" government from the state by means of Biblical self-government and to apply

their faith to every sphere of life and thought. We've already gained significant ground through helping to restore Christian education, but it's time to move into other spheres by God's grace, law, and power.

We desperately need your help to continue this mission, so please take a few moments today to prayerfully consider supporting Chalcedon with your tax-deductible giving. We've enclosed a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope to make it easy, and you can also donate online at: [Chalcedon.edu/Give](https://Chalcedon.edu/Give)

Non-Profit  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Raleigh, NC  
Permit No. 23



## CHALCEDON FOUNDATION\*

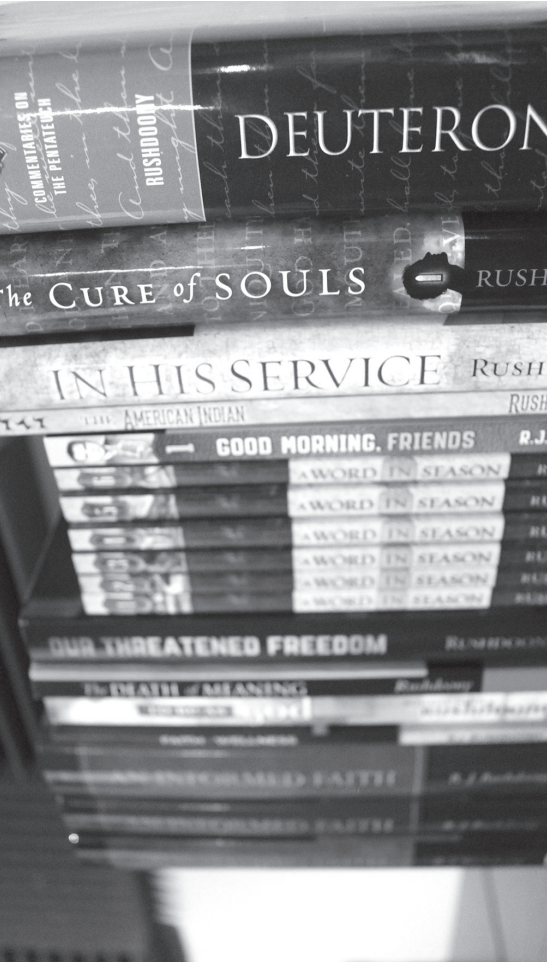
P.O. Box 158 • Vallecito, CA 95251-9989

Phone: (209) 736-4365

Fax: (209) 736-0536

email: [info@chalcedon.edu](mailto:info@chalcedon.edu)

[www.chalcedon.edu](http://www.chalcedon.edu)



## CHALCEDON YEAR-END SALE!

**SAVE 30% ON ALL ORDERS THRU JAN. 31, 2019**

**PLUS... 20% OFF ALL DIGITAL ITEMS!**

Visit our online store today for great books and resources to help equip you to advance His Kingdom

**SUPPORT CHALCEDON BY INVESTING IN YOU!**

**VISIT [CHALCEDONSTORE.COM](http://CHALCEDONSTORE.COM) TODAY!**