

ARISE & BUILD

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THE SANCTIFYING WORK OF RECONSTRUCTION

BY MARK R. RUSHDOONY



Much of the Old Testament consists of historical accounts. For most of that 3600-year time span, God was silent, and all the faithful experienced was the day-to-day life of work, responsibility, and toil, in addition to the challenge of maintaining their faith amongst pagans without and, frequently, apostates within the nation.

We falsely assume their life was peppered by miracles that made faith unnecessary, but the miracles were relatively rare, often seen only by a few, and grouped into a few years (largely those of the Exodus/wilderness and Elijah/Elisha eras).

Later Jesus would reprimand those who wanted signs (miracles) (Matt. 16:1–4). The need was to see, with Peter, that he was “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). Later Jesus would bless those who so believed without witnessing the miraculous (John 20:29).

Far from being a succession of miracles, the history of God’s people is one of the very normal challenges brought about by either their sin or that of their enemies. There was no “golden era” in either the old covenant or the new. Our joy in the Lord can be very real, but it is often tempered by the day-to-

day circumstances of serious problems, persecutions, and, sometimes, defeat and frustration.

Old Testament history is, therefore, not too different from our own. The survival of the covenant people was often in doubt, their nation was frequently at risk from either internal or external enemies until, on more than one occasion, there was no help save in the hand of God.

The same trend has been evident in the new covenant, though to a lesser extent. The new model that supplants the Hebrew nation is the Kingdom of God, the Davidic King of which is Jesus Christ (2 Sam. 7:12–13; 22:51; Matt. 1:1; Luke. 1:32–33). The congregation, or assembly, of people is now the *ecclesia*. There is, therefore, a very real correlation between the work, problems, and struggles of the people of God in the old and new covenants.

“TIPPING POINTS”

There have been times when men have seen events as a potential “tipping point” in the history of something larger than themselves, whether their culture, a cause, or civilization itself. They see a need to “dig in” and either defend and nurture what is good or defeat what is sinister.

Nehemiah and his contemporaries faced what they saw as such a tipping

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point in the history of the Jews in the fifth century B.C. It had been over 150 years since Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians and the Jews deported hundreds of miles away to Babylon. It had been over eighty years since a remnant had returned as promised, and just over sixty since that generation had rebuilt the temple. Nehemiah requested, and was granted, permission by the Persian emperor to return to Jerusalem and rebuild its walls and homes. To this point the walls and city had remained as the Babylonians had left it, in ruins.

Moreover, the cause of Nehemiah's request to the emperor was the persecution of the Jews (Neh. 1:2–3). Josephus, who wrote 500 years later, described attacks whereby some were “led away captive” (plausible from Neh. 5:8) and others were killed, their corpses found by the roads the next morning.¹ Nehemiah set about to do an emergency work to create a place of safety for the covenant people. The non-Jewish inhabitants of the land had lived there for about two centuries (having been moved there by the same policy of the old Assyrian empire that had removed the ten tribes). They included Samaritans and others, even Arabs (Neh. 2:10; 4:1–8). They were possessive of Judea and wanted the Jews to fail (Neh. 2:10; 4:8; 6:1–2).

Nehemiah, however, had authority from the emperor as governor over Jerusalem and the Jews. This did not stop an attempt by the non-Jews to form a coalition to attack them, a move they apparently would themselves justify as an emergency move to put down what they claimed was a rebellion (Neh. 2:19).

The building of the walls of Jerusalem was needed to stop the predations. As they began to work on the walls, the threat became an outright armed raid (Neh. 4:11). The cooperation

of the people, even those of outlying towns, is evidence of the urgency of the situation. A dozen or so years earlier, mixed marriages with these foreigners had threatened religious *assimilation*, and Ezra had ended them (Ezra 9–10). Now the danger was physical *annihilation*. The Jews saw their crisis as a “tipping point.”

Within a walled city, the people could go about their business with a unity of purpose. The lack of walls, however, made them easy prey so that their covenant life was a perilous one. The goal was the growth and prosperity of the Jews and the walls of Jerusalem were the means.

The people responded with a willingness to work. Each family was assigned a section of wall close to their homes. The third chapter of Nehemiah memorializes their names to inspire faithfulness in future generations. Work crews from Jericho built a gate on the north wall. Future inhabitants of Jericho who traveled to Jerusalem would enter through that gate. A man named Baruck is noted for “earnestly” repairing his section.

A SANCTIFIED WORK

Of particular note is the fact that the priests were the first to volunteer (Neh. 3:1). Their work in the temple was a holy one, set apart, consecrated, or sanctified to God. But here, they build the walls which defended God's people and “sanctified it.” Sanctifying their work and its result was not a casual or flippant act. It meant they saw the hard, physical work of building the wall as a holy one in the service of God and His people.

The challenge of the Jews in Nehemiah's day to rebuild Jerusalem is analogous to all efforts to serve God. The walls we build serve to protect the Kingdom of God and its citizens against the hostile threats of its ene-

mies. We have a great work before us, one that seems larger than our resources. We are often challenged, and the opposition barely disguises a hatred and contempt. One of the taunts of Nehemiah's day was, "Will they sacrifice?" (Neh. 4:2), sarcastically claiming that not even the favor of Jehovah could help them.

Like the Jews encamped around the ruins of the City of David, our first work is that which is closest to home; we do the work that God has put within our reach. We build as families, in terms of our place and callings. We are not lone wolves, atomistic, retreatist, or subsistence minded. We are *dominion oriented*.

The Jews of Nehemiah's day had to divert manpower in order to guard against surprise attack (Neh. 4:11–21). We must also protect the people of God from predators. We do so by homeschooling, by separating from wolves in disguise, and from worldliness and humanism in their every manifestation (1 Thess. 5:22). Like Ezra (and later both Nehemiah and Malachi) we forbid marriages outside the faith. Like the Jews, we protect ourselves in order that we can progress in the work of God's Kingdom. Our enemies, likewise, do not want to see our work succeed and will use every means possible to suppress us, including legal action (the Samaritan governor Sanballat spearheaded the opposition against the Jews) or even violence.

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the ruins of the City of David, our first work is that which is closest to home; we do the work that God has put within our reach. We build as families, in terms of our place and callings. We are not lone wolves, atomistic, retreatist, or subsistence minded. We are *dominion oriented*. We build, and the more we build, the more intense our opposition will become (Neh. 4:7). It is no accident that the enemies of Christianity are on the rise and their opposition more virulent. Humanism's failures are apparent and Christian countermeasures are seen as a threat to its hegemony.

As the priests sanctified their work on the walls of Jerusalem, we should also see our labors in the difficult work of reconstruction as consecrated to God. So, we remember those whose work in the Kingdom has helped enable our own; we recall their names as did Nehemiah in chapter three.

Building the walls was a defensive move to protect the people of God, but it led to the eventual expansion of the nation. Likewise, our defense must not be a social or cultural retreat, but a digging-in that declares, "We will not yield." We defend ourselves, as Nehemiah did, in the awareness that our goal is not survival, but the growth of the Kingdom of God and His Christ. Their work went on in perilous times, as must ours. We are on the side of Jesus, and therefore the victorious side in time and eternity. 🏰

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1. Walter F. Adeney, "Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther," in W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor's Bible* (New York: Hadder & Stoughton, n.d.), pp. 167–168.

STANDING IN THE WATERS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

BY MARTIN G. SELBREDE



Ezekiel 47:1–12 describes a river that starts as water seeping out from the temple doorway. In the well-known passage, the waters become ankle-deep a thousand cubits from the source, knee-deep a thousand cubits farther, and loin-deep a thousand cubits farther yet. Another thousand cubits from there and the river had swollen to impassable size (see verses 3 through 5).

Ezekiel experienced this *while in the middle of the waters*, not while observing, dry and safe, from the shore. His angelic guide didn't lead him back to the shore until after Ezekiel had encountered waters so deep he had to swim. The prophet is returned to shore only at verse 6, no doubt relieved they weren't going another thousand cubits downstream. Before being pulled out of the river (now so deep his feet no longer reached the bottom) Ezekiel hears the angel ask him, "Son of man, hast thou seen this?"

Angels: masters of understatement.

Fairbairn points out that despite having no tributaries, the river widens and deepens and the amount of water in it continues to increase:

The increase here comes from no extraneous and incidental sources; it is all along the temple waters that form the river, and at last empty themselves into the sea; and yet, from being at first but a small streamlet, these grow, by self-production, in the space of little more than a mile, into an unfordable river!¹

The crucial point to grasp here is *the*

unity of the water that Ezekiel was standing in. There are no breaks in the water: from bubbling stream to massive river, it is a single entity representing the Kingdom of God and illustrating its growth over time. No matter where Ezekiel stood in the waters, he was in the same water: he was in the midst of the Kingdom, whether in its earlier ankle-deep form or its later status as an immense river.

To hammer home the unity of this vision of the Kingdom, verse 12 says of the waters irrigating the trees alongside the huge river that they had "issued out of the sanctuary," which happened one thousand cubits before the waters ever reached Ezekiel's ankles. *There is only one river with only one kind of water in it from only one source.*

WATER IN MOTION

It is common to talk about the Kingdom of God being *now*, and simultaneously *not yet*. It is here, but not in its fullness. By the same token, Ezekiel was as much *in* the water when it was ankle-deep as when it was knee-deep, or loin-deep. But the conclusion of the vision involved water even deeper than that.

When we think the Kingdom is "not yet," that it's something wholly future, we miss the fact that we're standing in the middle of the Kingdom, somewhat closer to its origin than to its destination. But the same waters we're standing in right now will inexorably grow into their fullness.

And those waters are in motion, flowing and growing through time. The Kingdom is marked by growth

(Christ's Kingdom growth parables make this clear, with His mustard seed parable referencing the prophecy of Ezek. 17:22–23 that God would plant a tiny twig that would grow into a tree so large that all the birds under heaven would dwell in it). There was nothing static about this vision: the waters were flowing into their future form, but Ezekiel wasn't made aware of the truth of the matter until the angel led him through the middle of the water ever eastward, fast-forwarding the prophet so he could grasp what was happening.²

The Kingdom is not static. Time is on its side. Wherever we stand in the stream of time, we naturally make assumptions. We may be standing ankle-deep, and our theology says the waters will either stay ankle-deep or will dry up. We don't spontaneously assume the impossible: that the waters will multiply themselves miraculously as they move onward. And since we're conscious of the Scriptures that speak about a glorious river of living waters, of a glorious Kingdom, we easily scorn the ankle-deep waters and think, "These are *not* the waters God promised. We're not in the Kingdom. My wet feet here mean nothing, because God's not truly working yet, not ruling yet. We're obviously standing in the wrong water."

And we couldn't be more wrong.

THE DANGER OF DESPISING THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

Dr. R. J. Rushdoony drew attention to the practical implications of a failure to grasp our place in the current state of God's Kingdom:

This makes the issue clear-cut: there is no kingdom for us, if we are not in the kingdom now; there is no new creation we can look forward to in eternity, if we are outside the new creation now. The kingdom is and is to come; the new heavens and new earth are and are to come. The fullness is at

Our understanding of God's Kingdom, if defective, warps and distorts most everything in our Christian walk, causing the salt to lose its savor.

the end of time, but it is here today in reality. This means that Christians are neglecting their inheritance and failing to make use of their power in Christ: they live in terms of victory tomorrow instead of victory today ...

Revelation was written to suffering and troubled Christians, and also to smug and self-satisfied Christians, who alike waited for the kingdom to come and felt that the world's problems presented a hindrance to Christ and His kingdom. But Revelation makes clear that the kingdom is now, and that, not by evading conflict, responsibility, and suffering, but by assuming it, do Christians and the Church gain their inheritance.³

In short, bad theology always cripples those who follow after it. In this instance, our understanding of God's Kingdom, if defective, warps and distorts most everything in our Christian walk, causing the salt to lose its savor. And the defect here is failing to grasp the unity of His Kingdom: that the stream we're standing in (1) is the right stream—God's stream—and (2) that it will continue to grow in size and conquer every obstacle set in front of it. These waters, like the stone cut without hands, is God's own handiwork: His Kingdom penetrating the world of sin and darkness with living waters.

This fundamental unity of the Kingdom is brought into clear focus by Herman Ridderbos:

For what will ultimately be received in the kingdom of God depends upon what a man *possesses* of it now. For "he

that hath to him shall be given: and he that hath not shall lose everything.” And what a man “has” of it, depends upon hearing, i.e., upon the way in which he bears the responsibility with respect to the word of the kingdom that has been scattered like seed. This hearing is now “the measure with which a man metes” (Mark 4:24) ... Here, too, everything concentrates on the unity of the kingdom in the present and in the future. What one receives from the Sower will also be received from the Judge in double measure.⁴


Ridderbos then asks whether the parable of the mustard seed only focuses on the tiny seed and massive final tree, ignoring everything between, or if “there is also an indication of the process of development of the Kingdom that takes place in the meantime.”⁵ Is the end result (a massive tree) simply there to comfort⁶ those who only know the Kingdom in its humble beginnings? Or is that only part of the story, as Ridderbos suggests:

Yet it is unnatural to have an eye only for the beginning and the end and to eliminate at all cost all that lies in between. Everything depends upon the idea that is formed of the way in which progress is made from the small beginning to the wonderful end.⁷

And there it is in a nutshell: what lies in between the beginning and end? *We do*. We’re in the midst of the Kingdom, and can ill afford any misapprehensions on that point. Any teaching to the contrary derails us in the midst of that Kingdom, denies us the incentive to labor for His Kingdom, and mutilates “the measure with which a man metes” in determining our present duties and responsibilities.

For if Christ is not King now, then you might act as if you have no king but Caesar, and then give chapter and verse to justify your abdication. But at every point that Ezekiel observed the

growing stream, he was observing the Kingdom of God, whether shallow and humble or massive and torrential. It was a unity, without any breaks, interruptions, or parentheses.

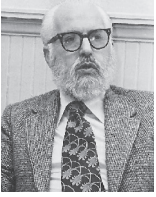
To stand in His stream, in the midst of His growing Kingdom, and deny it, is to close one’s eyes. When the apostles of retreatism one day face Him to explain how they preached the absence of His Kingdom, God might just simply ask them, “But aren’t your feet wet?” 

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1. Patrick Fairbairn, *An Exposition of Ezekiel* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, 1979 [T. & T. Clark, 1851]), pp. 492–493.
2. The fact is that “the kingdom of God cometh not by observation” (Luke 17:20), so Ezekiel’s is a special case where God allowed the prophet to observe its growth in a divine vision, given for our edification.
3. Rousas John Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1970), p. 251.
4. Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), p. 135.
5. *ibid.*, p. 145.
6. Ridderbos quotes H. M. Matter regarding the “eschatological great tension” that reduces some “to a state of impatience and despair on seeing the great distance between what the kingdom was yet to be and what was in the works of Jesus.” *ibid.*, p. 180, n104.
7. *ibid.*, p. 145.

THE KING IN OUR LIVES


BY R. J. RUSHDOONY



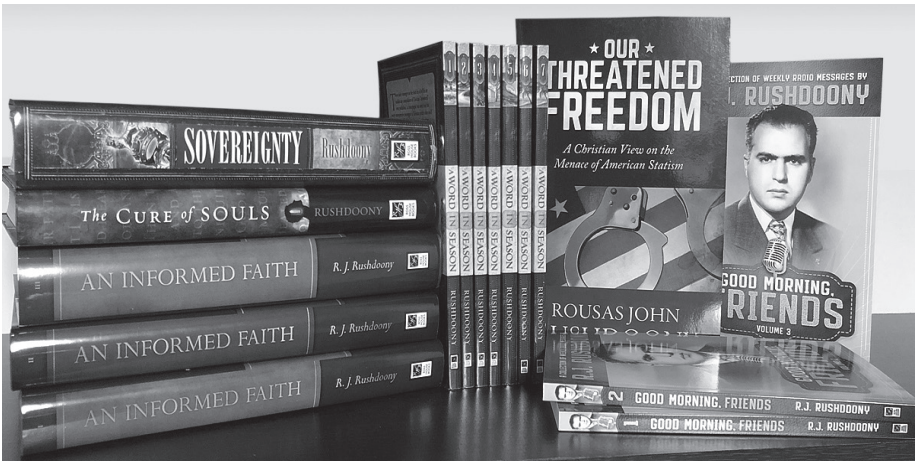
Paul in Romans 6:12 says, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.” If we read this verse in isolation from the preceding one, we fail to see its meaning. Romans 6:11 requires us to be dead to sin but “alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Too often, people are negative in their profession of faith; they are against sin, which is merely common sense. Everyone is against other people’s sins, while being indulgent of their own. Even criminal gangs are hostile to having any member cheat or rob them. However, we can be against our own sins and still be far from godly.

Our faith is not negative. It is not merely being against sin; it is the positive faith in and obedience to Christ

as our King or Lord. It is pharisaism and hypocrisy to see ourselves as good because we say yes to Jesus and see others as bad because they do not. Faith is more than a matter of words. It is life, a life lived in faithfulness and obedience to Christ as King. It means that Someone reigns or is king over us, even Jesus Christ, so that we live and move and have our being in obedience to every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. To be redeemed by Christ means that we are His possession and property and we live in terms of His law. It means that there is a king in our lives, and His name is Jesus Christ. To be under a king is to be obedient to Him and to serve Him. Who is the king in your life? 

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