

# ARISE & BUILD

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

## THE BOOK OF REVELATION

BY MARTIN G. SELBREDE



What is the proper home for the visions of the Book of Revelation? After twenty centuries, no final answer to this disputed question has been settled upon. Most eras, including our own, are awash in strident marketing and unseemly posturing, with various advocates arguing that their interpretation alone has reached the crowning achievement of certainty (not just plausibility).

Beams in the eye—optical lumber—prevent us from seeing any deficiencies in our own view while we criticize every jot and tittle of differing views. The line between strong convictions and arrogance has recently worn increasingly thin, becoming most threadbare on social media. Interpreting the Book of Revelation has become one more issue to polarize—and subsequently derail—us, while we anxiously await the next major commentary (the presumed “final word on the matter”) to be released.

Dr. R. J. Rushdoony “promoted” the preterist view of Revelation: the view that the book primarily covers events in the first century A.D. He himself was *not* a preterist, but he believed that sanctified scholarship needed to be applied to all plausible positions, leading him to encourage and underwrite in-depth studies along preterist lines despite the obvious departure from his own perspective. To this

day, Chalcedon remains a *sympathetic critic* of various preterist approaches to Revelation, valuing and respecting the contribution of scholars laboring in that field.

But Rushdoony was not a preterist. He took an *idealist* approach to Revelation, a perspective that was once well-known, but which has since suffered neglect as the preterism-or-bust mindset started to harden among the new generation of postmillennial Christians. In 1961, Charles Feinberg published *Premillennialism or Amillennialism?* Postmillennialism then was considered a nonfactor. But in 2019, we discern a parallel: futurism and preterism do battle but other views are rarely mentioned. This kind of tunnel vision is unedifying: the stone the builders reject might one day become the head of the corner.

*Futurism* holds that most of Revelation refers to a brief span of time taking place in the future, while *preterism* holds that the bulk of Revelation’s prophecies refer to the divorce of Israel and her destruction in 70 A.D. But two alternative views hold that Revelation applies to the centuries between the first and second advent: the *historicist* school of thought regards Revelation as providing a roughly sequential description of the inter-advent period, while the *idealist* view see John’s prophecy as non-sequential: *all* sections of the Apocalypse describe the *entire* inter-advent period. Each view claims

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a different “home” for Revelation’s prophecies: the future, the past, and (to varying degrees) the present.

## THE QUESTION OF RELEVANCE

Theologians often chide their opponents for making Revelation inapplicable to present concerns: *If it’s meant for some future generation, it’s not meant for us; or, If it all happened in the first century, what value does that have for us?* The usual reply is that most Biblical teaching is directed to ancient audiences, but no one argues that this renders His Word irrelevant or unprofitable (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Since “Thy commandment is exceeding broad” (Ps. 119:96b), there is always *indirect applicability* to us, given that He has magnified His Word above all His Name (Ps. 138:2).

Futurists and preterists *and historicists* find this *indirect applicability* satisfactory. Since historicism applies various parts of Revelation to different stages of history, it follows that unless you happen to live in the particular age where those visions are *directly* applicable, most of Revelation remains *indirectly applicable* to you. (The late Dr. Francis Nigel Lee, a noted historicist scholar, maintained a strong friendship with Dr. Rushdoony, showing that historicists and idealists were at one time able to peaceably coexist.)

Intrinsic to the *idealist* view is that it regards most of the book of Revelation as *directly applicable* to us, and not just *indirectly* applicable or relevant. While this isn’t a decisive factor in helping us settle the question as to which view is correct, *it remains a potent factor with tremendous significance*. *Idealism* puts us directly in the sweep of history toward Christ’s total victory, alerting us to the contours of the battles we are now in. *Idealism* is thus a *big picture* view of Revelation, pushing each section of the book deep into our consciousness

as a living word *directly for us*. We don’t need to glean lessons from it: *idealism* puts Revelation *right in our face*—not in the sense of gloom and doom, but of duty and responsibility and our calling to be more than conquerors.

Two months before his death, Dr. Rushdoony wrote a new introduction to his 1970 book *Thy Kingdom Come*, which includes his idealist commentary on Revelation. His comments hit the mark:

“This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). This is why knowing *Revelation* is so important. Some will believe I am wrong in many things about *Revelation*, but on this I am right. It assures us of our victory and celebrates it.<sup>1</sup>

The deep relevance of Revelation to our situation is what makes reading Dr. Rushdoony’s book so jarring to many: it brings distant visions uncomfortably close. I found the Puritans easy sledding in comparison.

But that’s not the full story: we’ve not yet mentioned the beatitudes. Not the nine beatitudes we know from the Sermon on the Mount, but the seven beatitudes that appear throughout the book of Revelation!<sup>2</sup> Because *idealism* sees the whole book as directly—and painfully—relevant to us, it draws strength from the conviction that these seven blessings are the *direct* possession of God’s people, *now*.

Is Revelation a punch in the gut for ancient apostate Israel (*preterism*) or a punch in the gut to an alleged future Antichrist (*futurism*)? Or is it actually a punch in the gut to you and me, with each page speaking *directly to us*? That possibility might well explain why *idealism* has become a hard sell in our day and age. 🙌

1. R. J. Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, [1970, 1998], 2001 printing), p. 1.

2. *ibid.*, p. 92.

# DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN RIGHTEOUS AND DECEITFUL CONCEALMENT

BY REV. PETER ALLISON



## IS IT EVER RIGHT TO LIE?

The propriety of Rahab's response to the King's messengers seeking the whereabouts of the Israelite spies has been an area of long standing debate.<sup>1</sup> Some believe that Christians in Rahab's position must always tell the truth and trust God to deliver them. Because of the favorable treatment Rahab received from Joshua and the commendation she receives in Hebrews 11 and James 2, those who hold this position will often bifurcate Rahab's action into a moral component (hiding the spies) and an immoral component (lying to the messengers). Others would acknowledge her hiding the spies and misleading directions to the messengers to be lying or deceptive, but consider them a "necessary evil" to obey a higher law or prevent a greater evil. Still others believe lying to enemies to protect the innocent from death is proper and even required.

Those who condemn all lies can cite strong support in the Scriptures.

1. Lies are forbidden by the ninth commandment (Exod. 20:16): You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. Proverbs 14:5 says a faithful witnesses will not lie. Proverbs 6:17 teaches God hates a lying tongue and Proverbs 12:22 that lying lips are an abomination to

Him. Liars, along with murderers, the sexually immoral, and idolaters, all have their part in the lake of fire and brimstone which is the second death (Rev. 21:8).

2. Both the Old and New Testament teach that God is truth and cannot lie. (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2; 2 Tim. 2:13; Ps. 31:5; Isa. 65:16; John 17:17 are a few of the many passages.)
3. Satan is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44—"You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.")

If Satan is the father of lies and speaks out of his own character when he lies, and lies are an abomination to the Lord, and God Himself cannot lie, then how can a lie ever be pleasing to the Lord in whose image we have been made? We are to follow in His ways. If lying is something that He hates and cannot do because it is contrary to His very nature, then how can it ever be right for us to lie?

These clear, direct statements about lying, coupled with numerous other warnings in Scriptures against lying and the absence of any passages speaking favorably of lying, should compel us to conclude that lying is always wrong.

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## DEFINITION OF LYING

However, while the prohibition against lying is clear and simple, distilling from Scripture what conduct constitutes a lie and what conduct does not constitute a lie is not nearly so simple. One of the more helpful and comprehensive compilations of conduct forbidden by the ninth commandment, which is a summary statement of God's law regarding the proper handling of the truth, is the Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC), Question 145. Some of the actions it classifies as lies are "undue silence in a just cause,"<sup>2</sup> silence "when iniquity calls for either a reproof from ourselves or a complaint to others,"<sup>3</sup> and "speaking the truth unseasonably or maliciously to a wrong end."<sup>4</sup>

In other words, we can lie by revealing the truth when we ought to have concealed the truth (e.g., speaking the truth at the wrong time or to the wrong person), and we can lie by covering the truth when we should have revealed the truth (e.g., simply being silent when we should have spoken).

We could say that a lie is the *unjust handling of the truth*, either revealing it when it should be hidden or hiding it when it should be revealed. This is exactly analogous to how we routinely view the other commandments in the second table. Not all killing of people is murder. Murder is *unjust* killing of another person. Not all forcible taking of another person's property is theft (e.g., lawfully exacted restitution). Only *unjust* taking of another's property is theft. Neither is all sexual intercourse fornication. In fact the failure to engage in sexual intercourse can, in certain situations, be a transgression of the seventh commandment.<sup>5</sup> I would submit that just as we don't consider lawful killing to be murder or lawful intercourse to be fornication, neither should we consider the *just concealment* of the truth to be lying.

This is not an attempt to redefine words. In its definition of lying, *Webster's 1828 Dictionary* states, "... a false statement, not intended to deceive, mislead or injure ... is not a lie."

This definition of lying is also consistent with how the Scripture uses language pertaining to lying and concealment of the truth.<sup>6</sup> There are a number of Hebrew words used in the OT to denote lying and deception.<sup>7</sup> Of these *sheger* is by far the most frequent and the one used in the ninth commandment in Exodus 20. What is interesting is that none of these words are ever used to describe false statements or other actions to conceal the righteous from the wicked that God has commended. When describing these actions the Old Testament Scriptures often use the word *tsâphan*, which simply means to hide. But actions exposing the righteous to the wicked are called lies, even when the statements doing so were true.

A couple of events in the life of David illustrate this. In 1 Samuel 21, David, in fear of his life, acts in such a way as to get Achish to believe he was insane when he wasn't. The ruse succeeds and David escapes. In Psalm 34 David writes about this experience. First, he magnifies the Lord for delivering him from all his troubles when David cried out to Him (vv. 3–10). Then he exhorts all those who desire to live long and blessed lives to keep their lips from speaking deceit (vv. 11–14). If David had been acting deceptively toward Achish, he would not exhort us to refrain from deceit if we desire life. He would say, "Little children, if you want to live, sometimes you need to lie and deceive people." But not only does he say just the opposite, at least ten times he also says God delivers those who fear Him, who trust in Him, who call on Him, who are righteous, etc. Writing in the Spirit David never repents of acting

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deceptively nor gives any indication that his behavior was anything other than trusting in God to deliver him.

On the other hand, in his Spirit originated characterization of Doeg, David calls him a liar for his untimely disclosure of the truth:

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? ... Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. You love evil more than good, lying rather than speaking righteousness. ... You love all devouring words, you deceitful tongue. God shall likewise destroy you forever; ... The righteous also shall see and fear, and shall laugh at him, saying, "Here is the man who did not make God his strength, but ... strengthened himself in his wickedness." (From Psalm 52:1-7)

Even though what Doeg told Saul was true (1 Sam. 22:9-10), his words exposed the righteous to the evil intentions of Saul and therefore constituted lying. Saul, of course, would not have considered Doeg to be lying. In his view of the world, Doeg was telling the truth about a treacherous man. It should go without saying: God's view is the truth.

Other Scriptures classify more typical unjust handling of the truth as lying: Sarah's denial that she laughed (Gen. 18:15), Achan's hiding the Jericho loot (Josh. 7:11), and the Bethel prophet's telling the man of God an angel had told him to feed him (1 Kings 13:18). Like the examples from Psalm 34 and 52, these statements are not just a scriptural record of what people said, but God's assessment of these actions in naming them as lies.

On the other hand, none of the Hebrew words for lying are ever used to describe the righteous being hidden from the wicked, including the four most well-known cases: Moses' mother hiding him from Pharaoh, Shiphrah and Puah giving a factually incorrect statement to Pharaoh to hide the new-

born Hebrew males from his murderous intentions, Rahab hiding the spies and giving a factually incorrect report to the soldiers, or Obadiah's hiding the prophets of Jehovah from Jezebel.

In fact, in each case, the Scriptures identify the fear of the Lord as the motivation of their actions to hide the righteous from the wicked. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil (Prov. 8:13) and by the fear of the Lord one departs from evil (Prov. 16:6). It would be most incongruous to ascribe the motivation of people engaged in the abominable sin of lying to the fear of the Jehovah. Although Pharaoh and Jezebel would have considered these hidings to be deception, God does not. Psalm 31:20 and 83:3 both say that God Himself hides His people from evil conspirators. And in the battle for Ai, God commanded Joshua to employ a fairly elaborate ruse to induce the enemy to believe something that was not true (Josh. 8:2-7). Obviously, giving a false report to enemies in a just war is not contrary to God's very nature nor something that He cannot do.

The Bible never identifies hiding of the righteous from the wicked, either verbally or non-verbally, as lying even when false statements are given. On the contrary, it commends such actions in the New Testament as proceeding from faith and holds them up to us as examples of people who feared God. But it does classify as lies revealing the righteous to the wicked, even when only true statements were spoken.

In answer to the title question, Rahab did not lie because her false statement hid the righteous from the wicked.

## **DOES SCRIPTURE ONLY COMMEND RAHAB'S CONCEALMENT OF THE SPIES?**

There are many important nuances that space does not permit us to discuss. But one worthy position that

should be acknowledged distinguishes between her false statement and her concealment of the spies. In this view, the commendations of Scripture are applied to her hiding the spies and not the false statement.

This is a well-respected position with a long history in the church and there are undoubtedly examples where the Lord has honored those who practice this view. While I have no interest in attacking this view, I would make a few observations.

1. It was by faith Rahab did not perish with those who didn't believe, when she received the spies in peace (Heb. 11:31). This is a summary statement of the entire transaction described in Joshua 2 which included both the hiding and the false statement. Both of those actions constitute concealment and are either both right, or both wrong, depending on whether she was concealing the righteous from the wicked or vice versa. If the people of Jericho were not under God's ban, then both acts of concealment would have been sinful deception and treason against the civil magistrate.<sup>8</sup> Actions can be deceptive as much as words. If her hiding the soldiers was not deceitful, then neither should her false statement be considered a lie.
2. Rahab's choice was between hiding the Israelites from the soldiers or revealing the Israelites to the soldiers. Passivity in failing to hide the Israelites, such as not answering when asked if she was hiding the spies, is just a less direct and possibly less heinous form of revealing the Israelites to the soldiers. She is either for the Israelites or she is against them (Mark 9:40). Some would argue that she should have hid the spies and simply been silent in the face of questioning by the

soldiers. But this fails to grasp the nature of the situation. Silence in the face of questions concerning the spies seen entering her house would have been a tacit admission the spies might still be with her. It would have been seen as not cooperating with the soldiers and endangered her own life as well as the spies. 🙏

**Peter Allison** is a former nuclear submarine engineer, headmaster, college instructor, and diamond grower. He is the author of *Dollar Noncents* and holds 5 patents from his current engineering work for a Fortune 10 company. Peter also serves as the pastor of Crown & Covenant Church near Houston, Texas where he lives with his wife of 33 years, their seven children, a dairy goat herd, and other associated critters.

1. A full survey of the many nuanced positions on the proper handling of the truth in such circumstances is beyond our scope. But a few examples are: Augustine, "On Lying," in Schaff, ed., (2012) *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* Ser. 1 3, pp. 457–477. Calvin, (1984) *Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. 4, pp. 47–48. Baxter, (2008) *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, Vol. I., p. 117. Dabney, (1985) *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, pp. 419–426. Turretini, (1994) *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol. 2, pp. 129–134. Hodge, (1989) *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, pp. 439–444. Murray, (1957) *Principles of Conduct*, pp. 123–148. Rushdoony, (1973) *Institutes of Biblical Law*, Vol. 1, pp. 542–549.
2. Lev. 5:1; Deut. 13:8; 2 Tim. 4:16.
3. Isa. 59:4.
4. Prov. 29:11; 1 Sam. 22:9-10; cf. Ps. 52:1–5.
5. I Cor. 7:3, 5; Prov. 5:19; WLC, Q. 138.
6. And as much as I admire Webster's work, this has far more weight.
7. e.g., kâchash, sheqer, hâthal, kâzab, shâv, tâ'a', mirmâh, 'âvath, châmâs
8. e.g., see Deut. 13:8

# PROBLEMS

BY R. J. RUSHDOONY



“Problems, problems,” a man remarked recently. “How I would like to be rid of them.”

At times, all of us have echoed this feeling. We struggle along, year after year, hoping that our problems will soon be over, but they do not disappear. They merely change.

The problems can be in our family, our neighborhood, our church, our country, or in ourselves. The problems can be a drought drying up our crops, or a flood, a killing frost, or a burning, scorching sun. “The good old days” sound good only because we have forgotten what the problems of those times were. Childhood, youth, middle age, and old age all have their problems, as does every era of history.

Problems are a part of life in a fallen world, and they are a necessary part of it, necessary to our testing and to our growth. Be sure of this: when you solve one problem, you create a new situation which has problems of its own. Problems are in part a product of sin and in part a condition of growth.

Before the Fall, no doubt Adam had decisions to make in Eden, as he farmed that paradise, and problems connected with developing and tending

it. There was yet no curse, and hence no perversity to the situation, but there were problems to be resolved.

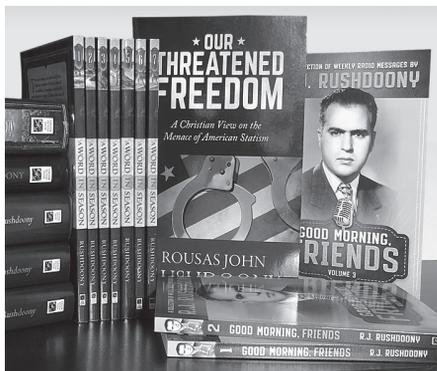
We need to accept problems and testing as a condition of life. Even in Eden, apart from the problems of farming, Adam and Eve were every day put to the test. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil could be bypassed or not. God presented them always with the problem of faith and obedience.

Solve one problem, and you will have another. This is life, and to be sick of problems is to be sick of life. Because this is God’s world, every problem has its answer, and with every answer we graduate to another problem, until we finally pass on into God’s eternal Kingdom and our reward.

Problems are thus not only aspects of a fallen world, as well as aspects of a growing world, but they are also opportunities sent from God, to test us, to enable us to grow, and to further us in the fulfillment of our calling.

No man can avoid problems. The man who tries to avoid problems only creates greater ones. If we regard them as opportunities, we are the stronger for it. 🙌

Taken from *A Word in Season: Daily Messages on the Faith for All of Life*, Volume 1, pp. 138-1399.



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