

# ARISE & BUILD

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## THE CROOKED SHALL BE MADE STRAIGHT

BY MARTIN G. SELBREDE

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. (Isaiah 40:3-5)



There'd be no reason for the prophet to talk about the crooked being made straight unless we start with a crooked post-fall

world. Ecclesiastes 7:29 tells us that “God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.” When we translate that into the imagery of paths, roads, and highways, we arrive at Isaiah’s indictment of man: “The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace” (Isa. 59:8).

Many Christians today adopt the “autonomous epistemology”<sup>1</sup> of Eccl. 1:15 and Eccl. 7:13 to justify letting their hands hang limp rather than making straight paths (Heb. 12:12-13). They don’t consider that the author of Ecclesiastes walked by sight when he said “Observe the work of God, for who can straighten what he has made crooked?” Bartholomew says,

His empiricism enables him to see that the world is bent and broken, but it cannot take him any further than that. It is as though his world is confined to that ushered in by Gen. 3, the fall ... But the larger context of Gen. 3, of creation and redemption through the

line of Abraham, alerts us that God is at work making straight what has been bent and broken.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, God’s Word goes further: it commands *us* to make straight paths. We have a key part to play in “the restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21).

Christian Reconstruction, simply stated, involves the process of making the crooked places straight. When God commands us (for “prepare ye” is in the plural) to prepare the Lord’s way by making the highway in the desert straight (Isa. 40:3), our taking that command seriously leads to the result that “the crooked shall be made straight” (Isa. 40:4). When all crooked places are made straight, “all flesh together” (Isa. 40:5) shall see God’s glory revealed in the earth.

### GOD’S HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM

As Warfield said, “The world has always been very evil, ever since there entered it, through that forbidden fruit, the sin of man and all our human woes. Throughout all the ages, its sin has gone up reeking before God to heaven.” We see such desolation in the imagery of Isaiah 33:8—“The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth: he hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth no man.”

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But two chapters later the situation has changed. “And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein” (Isa. 35:8). What happened? God’s people got busy building things straight, viz., the paths where the redeemed will walk (Isa. 35:9).

These metaphorical highways are built by the casting up of stones to create a way through the wilderness.

Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people. (Isa. 62:10)

Similar themes are laid out in Isaiah 57 as well.

He that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain; And shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people. (Isa. 57:13b-14)

The difficulties of doing such work in the desert is acknowledged in Isaiah 58:12, but God’s men *do build* despite the location.

And they that shall be of Thee shall build the old waste places: Thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and Thou shalt be called, The Repairer of the breach, The restorer of the paths to dwell in. (Isa. 58:12)

How do you know who is of God? Those that build, those that reconstruct: *they* are the ones “that shall be of Thee.”

## WHO IS CALLED TO BUILD THE NEW, STRAIGHT HIGHWAYS?

Edward J. Young provides key insights into Isaiah’s prophecy.

Isaiah’s command to “make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isa. 40:3) is issued to those that God calls “my people” (Isa. 40:1).<sup>3</sup>

He will come to His own again: but they must prepare the way. If the reference were to a journey of the people of God, then God Himself would clear and prepare the way; but inasmuch as the picture is that of God coming to His people, it is the people who must prepare.<sup>4</sup>

The command is “Prepare ye [plural] the way of the Lord.” Rawlinson asserts that “the way of the Lord” is “the way of holiness” of Isaiah 35:8.<sup>5</sup> That is precisely the highway to be built by His people.

## THE NATURE OF THE WORK

There is progression in this passage in Isaiah. J. Alec Motyer asserts that Isaiah 40:3-5 “contrasts the unpromising landscape (3b-e) with the coming glory (5ab) and calls for total transformation in preparation (4).”<sup>6</sup> We start with difficult circumstances (the crooked world of humanism) and labor to make all things straight. This is what David describes in Psalm 119:128: “Therefore all precepts of all I make straight” (original Hebrew).

The whole impression here intended to be made is that of a way opened through a wilderness by levelling the ground and the removal of obstructions.<sup>7</sup>

As Christoph Starke (1684-1744) observed, “it costs time and labor to level mountains.”<sup>8</sup> He adds that “God seeks fruit and is not contented with mere leaves.”<sup>9</sup> God is looking for straight paths to be built. Statham elaborates:

“Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” There are the ruins of the old military roads of the Caesars, but the Caesars are gone. There the Ptolemies of olden time made incursions, but their sway is past. But the highways of commerce, the freer intercourse of peoples, the more humanizing influences of equity in law, and reformation in punishment, the kindly workings of pity and charity

to the neglected and forgotten;—all these are preparation-paths for the great King who is to reign in righteousness. Not alone through the royal gates of olden prophecies, but through the triumphal arches of redeeming ideas and influences which He has set at work, the Messiah shall come.<sup>10</sup>

## THE RESULTS OF MAKING STRAIGHT WHAT IS CROOKED

Edward J. Young walks us through what God promises when the crooked ways are finally made straight and the highway of holiness is completed.

The prophet now explains in detail how the general command of the previous verse is to be carried out. What is presented in verse 4 is a simple description of what will occur in the future ... The wondrous changes in nature are figurative of the preparations of the way for the Lord to come to His own.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, it is stated that the crooked will become straight, and the rough places a plain.<sup>12</sup>

In Isaiah the sovereign Yahweh comes, not from one city to another in festal procession, but eschatologically and with redemption, transforming all nature before Him and displaying His glory that all flesh may see it.<sup>13</sup>

It is of interest to note that Isaiah does not speak of all men, but of all flesh. And it is of interest also to note that he uses the word *together*, a word so characteristic of his prophecy. Altogether, as a unity, all flesh will see the glory of the Lord.<sup>14</sup>

Is working with “stones” worth your time? Just remember “what the power of God can make out of stones: 1. Of stones of the desert, children of Abraham; 2. Of stony hearts, hearts of flesh.”<sup>15</sup>

## THE VOICE CALLING US TO BUILD THE STRAIGHT HIGHWAY

The “voice” that cries to us to make

straight God’s highway continues to sound.

The prophecy of Isaiah 40, though it has a *real*, has no *direct* or *exclusive* reference to John the Baptist. A manifestation of the glory of God is announced, which, beginning with the return from Babylon, is beheld in incomparable splendor at the coming of Christ, and since goes on in growing fulfillment, but is not completed till the last day ... This voice began to sound when Isaiah first perceived and interpreted it; it was heard with unusual power through John’s instrumentality; it will not be silent till the last trumpet shall be heard.<sup>16</sup>

This ongoing voice calls us to His service. Johnson refers to “the mysterious call” emanating from Isaiah 40:3.

From what is to be believed of Jehovah, we pass to what is to be done for Jehovah. So ever does faith push on to practice. The internal act of the mind realizes itself and is made perfect in the external act of the life. “Clear ye Jehovah’s way in the desert” are words that pierce through our sensuality and break up our lethargic indolence.<sup>17</sup>

## THE STRAIGHT HIGHWAYS WE BUILD HAVE A BRIGHT FUTURE

In Isaiah 19, the conversion of the Gentile nations is symbolized by the conversion of Egypt and Assyria. The conversion of Egypt is mentioned first (Isa. 19:18), where five of six cities in Egypt speak “the tongue of Canaan” (Hebrew) and the sixth “city of destruction” no longer exists. The Egyptians build an altar and pillar to the Lord. Verse 21 speaks of God knowing Egypt, and the Egyptians knowing the Lord, Whom they perform sacrifice and oblation to, vowing vows to Him and performing them. The highway appears at verse 23:

In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the

Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance. (Isaiah 19:23-25)

Romans 11:25-26 is Paul's explanation for this—Israel's two foes (representing all Gentiles) come in first, and Israel is the third part. The highway allows Egypt and Assyria to serve God together in blessing to the world.

The imagery of God's highways precedes Isaiah's prediction that China ("the land of Sinim") shall be transformed by the gospel.

And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim. (Isa. 49:11-12)

## GOD WORKS THROUGH HIS PEOPLE WHO BUILD

Just as the present crookedness presents obstacles to us, similar obstacles beset the work of rebuilding God's temple after the Babylonian exile. Zechariah connects the leveling of mountains with the concept of straightness (represented by the plumb-line used to build the second temple straight and true).

Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those

seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth. (Zech. 4:7-10 KJV)

We must see ourselves working as Zerubbabel worked: his hands lay the foundation, his hands bring forth the headstone, but the work has God in the midst of it. God's eyes are fully focused on the piece of tin hanging on a string that guides the reconstruction process. When we take up the plummet to build things straight, God is fully involved in our work. Then shall the crooked be made straight. 🏗️

1. Craig G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), p. 250.
2. *ibid*, p. 251. Bartholomew holds that the universal spread of *shalom* is the actual end game in history.
3. Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, [1972] 2000), vol. 3, p. 28.
4. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
5. Spence & Exell, *The Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, n.d.), Vol. 10, Section 2, p. 66.
6. J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), p. 300.
7. J. A. Alexander, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978 reprint of 1875 edition), vol. 2, p. 96.
8. Quoted in John Philip Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Mark-Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), vol. 2 (Luke), p. 60.
9. *ibid*.
10. W. M. Statham quoted in Spence & Exell, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
11. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
12. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
13. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 28, n.14.
14. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
15. Lange, *Luke*, p. 60.
16. Lange, *Luke*, p. 55.
17. E. Johnson, quoted in Spence & Exell, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

# CHRISTIAN RECONSTRUCTION AND OUR SMALL PART IN A BIG IDEA

BY MARK R. RUSHDOONY



**C**hristian Reconstruction is a very big idea. As such, it can inspire us with a vision of something

far larger than ourselves, yet such a big picture approach can distract us into speculation about what the future we believe in might look like. There is room for such forward thinking if it helps us understand our next necessary step, but it can mean we put the cart before the horse and fail to do the hard work of reconstruction that confronts us now.

Years ago, I heard an “organizing coach” say the place to start decluttering is always your immediate work area. Clear what is in front of you and work outward from there. Christian Reconstruction must likewise start with us and our immediate environs. We cannot try to change the distant future, but we can change ourselves and what is near us. Our primary responsibility is what is in front of us.

## THE BIG PICTURE IS FOR PERSPECTIVE

The Bible itself gives us a “big picture” approach, but always so that we understand our immediate and personal responsibilities. It puts our lives into the perspective of all human history. Scripture tells us of the predestinating providence of God before the world began and the eternal destiny of men when earthly history ceases. Within that history it clearly identifies man’s moral problem and its resolution in the atonement of Jesus Christ. It then gives us the big picture of the Kingdom of God, the renewal

of all things under the Lordship of Jesus. The “worldview” gives us an understanding of how we find ourselves in it, so that it becomes our “world and life view.”

The big picture of Scripture, then, is for understanding, not speculation. It ought not to divert us from our work and responsibilities, but to give them a context of meaning and purpose in God’s larger plan. The big picture is a gracious revelation that gives us focus because of the clarity it brings to our lives. It is not for theoretical contemplation but for the strengthening of believers in their small sliver of the Kingdom.

The most common theme of Jesus during His earthly ministry was the Kingdom of God (or Heaven). On one occasion (Luke 13:18-21) He gave two very quick analogies to describe its growth. One was a small mustard seed, which would eventually grow into a tree in which birds would roost. The second example was yeast, which was mixed into loaves of bread that eventually would cause the bread to rise. Neither’s growth could be seen, but it was real. Both the farmer and the woman could go about their other duties with the assurance that the mustard tree would grow, and the bread would rise.

Christian Reconstruction is an analogy of the Kingdom as well, not of its slow *rate of growth* but of the *believer’s responsibility* in the Kingdom that implies that the work is a step-by-step progression towards a final goal. Our foundation is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11), the rock (Luke 6:47-48).

Analogies are always limited, so it

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shouldn't be surprising that there is one area in which our work is not comparable to most construction. Because the author and finisher of our faith is Jesus (Heb. 12:2), we neither design what we build nor even know what the finished edifice will look like. It is impossible for us to see the future, and when you compound that with the fact that we cannot predict the work of God's Spirit, we can never know what the fullness of the Kingdom might look like. The best we can do is understand what it will not entail, and work to resist evil and stand in terms of the righteousness of God and the certainty that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt.6:10).

### OUR SMALL STEPS

The work of the Kingdom takes place, like the growth of a mustard plant or yeast, very slowly. Christian Reconstruction should be used to plan present duty, not what the maturity of the Kingdom might look like. The Lord of the Kingdom will direct it and the Holy Spirit will enable it. When I was in elementary school, I remember teachers saying, from their desk, "I should see the top of your head; if you are looking at me you aren't doing your work." Christian Reconstruction should be a head-down, get-to-work approach. Our work begins with that which God has put before us, and that work may only be an interim step. The point is to make progress as best we know how.

When Christians began thinking of an alternative to government schools, their first and natural inclination was to model the public-school system with Christian day schools, yet relatively few have survived because they are based on the economic model of a tax-subsidized system. Homeschooling solved that economic hurdle but has limitations that have room for other forms of education.

One of those forms is quite ancient: apprenticeship. They need not be as rigid as they once were and would not require a child to reside with a "master," but certainly Christian businesses could be more proactive in recruiting trainees from within the church and homeschool community. Certainly, there is a growing consensus that college has been oversold as a ticket to a vocation. Before he was in high school, my grandnephew was taught locksmithing by a grandparent giving him a good paying, marketable job as he pursues his degree in engineering. Most skills can be learned on the job and many do not require academic credentials. I have read many obituaries of men whose careers began when appreciative businessmen actively solicited returning G.I.s after WWII. Many of these young men had no work experience in the fields for which they were hired, but many were trained into careers and became executives of, some even owners of, companies in those industries.

When a degree is required, online college degrees, though in their infancy, do show promise. The most educated men I have met, and even those with academic degrees, have been largely self-taught, regardless of their academic paper trail. Pastoral training does not require seminary training. My father was a critic of academia in general and particularly seminaries, as they were controlled by men too often removed from the practical needs of pastoral duties. Pastoral training was itself once accomplished at the local church level in a tutorial relationship, which precluded a preoccupation in the institutional environment with the theorizing of other academics. Such thinking, particularly at the more advanced degree level, centers on "new" and "innovative" thought, not on orthodoxy. "Scholarship" became

a rationale for the study of higher criticism. Even if such criticism is ultimately rejected, it can easily become the primary area of study, and hence a detriment to studied faithfulness.

Another area in which small steps are being taken is in the area of business and economics. Business involves the creation of wealth, the increase of resources through work. The strength of capitalism is its foundation in private property (the eighth commandment “thou shalt not steal”) and personal responsibility (the fourth commandment’s requirement that we labor six days). God expects increase from our labor. The parable of the talents clearly shows that which was earlier made clear in the tithe being required on our *increase*. Capitalism’s emphasis on savings and the utilization of accumulated wealth has, in recent generations, been largely replaced by the opposite, the manipulation of debt, first by the U.S. government and now by individuals and corporations. Radio personality and author Dave Ramsey has a ministry that has focused on a very narrow but important part of Biblical law, the avoidance of debt (though he is not a theologian or reconstructionist). His focus is the empowerment and opportunity for generosity (what I would suggest is Kingdom financing) that debt-free living affords. Thousands have been successfully encouraged to stop manipulating debt and build wealth. Addressing our national debt and fiat money is not within our reach as individuals but getting out of debt is. This small step can empower you now.

The emphasis on college degrees after WWII was been largely geared toward an employment goal. Your degree bought you a ticket to be considered worthy of a salary, but this has been used as a scheme to put job seekers so far into debt that

the educational moneylenders own the resulting salary. A new wave is developing that will complement the emphasis television personality Mike (“Dirty Jobs”) Rowe is trying to make on the need for skilled tradesmen. That is the emphasis on entrepreneurship, which involves skills that need to be taught and encouraged so that our talents are used productively.

Our small steps of reconstruction must include the church as well. We give lip service enough to the community of faith, but we tend to be largely independent for six days of the week. I mentioned the employment and apprenticeship programs congregations could encourage. Jewish communities are famous for employing sons or nephews; this is rare in most churches. Some ethnic groups do the same thing, so donut shops, or every mini mart in a region, is owned by one ethnic group. We should not decry this; we should congratulate them for this initiative to develop the financial strength of their group. We should also emulate them, because they are communities beyond a weekly gathering or two. Do you have a skill? Develop it in the community of faith. It will help them in their use of God’s gifts. Train the workers in the Kingdom. Teach wealth-building to tomorrow’s tithers.

When only the foundation of the temple was laid, the people became discouraged in that they knew it would not be a showplace like Solomon’s destroyed temple was. The response of God’s prophet was “[W]ho hath despised the day of small beginnings?” (Zech.4:10). It was their *privilege* to work on the foundation, and it is ours to begin the work of Christian Reconstruction.

So, we put our head down and get to work. Our part of the future is the mess in front of us. 🏗️

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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

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