

ARISE & BUILD

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EMBRACING THE GOD WHO SHAKES OUR WORLD

BY MARTIN G. SELBREDE



E. W. Hengstenberg (1802–1869) commented on Hebrews 12:27, observing that the verse is often rendered erroneously,

obliterating the *purpose* behind the verse. Bear with this brief technical discussion to get to the meat of his conclusion:

The word *hina* has also been incorrectly rendered ecabatically, “so that that which is not moveable remains,” instead of “*in order that* that which is not moveable may remain.” That the things which are not moveable should remain, is the design of the removal of those things which are; and their continuance, therefore, must necessarily present an irreconcilable contradiction to the establishment of the immovable . . . Every created thing, so far as it is opposed to the kingdom of God, must be shaken and laid in ruins, that this kingdom may continue to stand.¹

Puritan scholar John Owen sets forth the same conception. His final point is that God left the temple in Jerusalem in ruins, removing one of His own institutions, to make way for His immovable Kingdom. If He would destroy His own institutions, which of man’s humanistic institutions are immune from His shaking?

The “things that cannot be moved,” are to remain and be established against all opposition whatever. Wherefore, as the heavens and the earth of the idolatrous world were of old shaken and removed, so shall those also of the antichristian world, which at present in many places

seem to prevail. All things must give way, whatever may be comprised in the names of heaven and earth here below, unto the gospel, and the kingdom of Christ herein. For if God made way for it by the removal of His own institutions, which He appointed for a season, what else shall hinder its establishment and progress unto the end?²

Hebrews 12:27 is based on Haggai 2:6–7, which explicitly includes the nations within the scope of the prophecy. The implications are significant. It means the shaking referred to has been in progress for twenty centuries already, and will continue until all things shakable shall be removed. R. J. Rushdoony’s comments on Hebrews 12 are pertinent in this connection:

There is a declared continuity between the words spoken to Moses on Mount Sinai and the words spoken by Jesus Christ. At Sinai, that voice shook the earth; now, in terms of Haggai 2:6–7, all things are again being shaken (Heb. 12:26). This is a continuous shaking to the end of the world, and its purpose is to shake down all things so that only those things which cannot be shaken may remain (v. 27).

History is thus a time of shaking in order to bring down all things whose foundation is not the Rock, Jesus Christ. Clearly, this echoes our Lord’s final words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:24–27). He alone is the unshakable foundation which can withstand the earthquakes and floods of history. Anything without Him as the foundation will perish.

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Because history is of God's ordination, it moves to eliminate all that is against Him, and all that is not clearly for Him.³

The *same shaking* that effects the downfall of Christ's enemies in the past and present will continue to work until *by that specific agency* all opposition to Christ's Kingdom has been dissipated into nothingness. There is no discontinuity or break between the beginning of the *seismos* (the shaking) and its consummation. The ongoing shaking begun at Christ's first advent is *utterly sufficient* to remove *all opposition to God's Kingdom* from this world. God doesn't need any additional interventions to secure this end: the end result is guaranteed with forces already set in motion by the Lord God.

THE PURPOSE OF THE SHAKING

The shaking is intended to remove one set of things so that another thing entirely will remain as a result of the process. Cockerill says of "the shaking of the nations" that "it implies the establishing of God's rule."⁴

Rushdoony sheds even further light on this shaking in his comments on Zephaniah.

In Zeph. 3:9–13 he declares that there is a necessity of moral sifting. God always shakes the world. God always judges the nations and every generation, shaking the things that are so that the things which cannot shaken may alone remain. This is God's process, not only with the nations, but with us. Every one of us is subject constantly to that shaking of God.

What men yearn for is security. What men try to gain age after age is cradle-to-grave security, and it's an impossibility. It is an impossibility because God is dedicated to this one proposition where man's security is concerned—that he cannot have it.⁵

God denies security to man. Earthquakes are a continuing reminder that our roots and foundations in this world are not to be trusted. All our towers of Babel are doomed. Political and cultural

concussions will cease only when their foreordained object has been attained. "There is no peace, saith the Lord, for the wicked" (Isaiah 57:21 and 48:22) means that shaking is their lot in life, not peace. When the wicked are shaken out of the earth, then "abundance of peace shall endure until the moon be no more" (Psalm 72:7). We arrive at this unshakable peace when the world is converted to Christ and He has no more enemies against which He sets His face.

THE SHAKING AS A BLESSED PROMISE OF GOD

"But now hath He promised" is a key phrase in Hebrews 12:26. It strongly affirms that this shaking of all things is *promised* by God, and as such faithfully fulfills His promise to *us*. On this ground alone, the shaking should be welcomed and embraced by His people! God brings unshakable things out from under the shakable ruins.

Alexander C. Purdy pointed out that "the sack of Rome by Alaric and the Visigoths in 410 shook the morale of the Romans as nothing else had done. It seemed the end of the world. Yet this very disaster called forth Augustine's *The City of God*, which helped to lay the foundations of a new civilization that would one day emerge from the Roman ruins."⁶

T. V. Moore expounds further on the importance of this shaking:

Our God is a consuming fire, and will destroy all that is not found built on this immovable foundation. Hence this passage [Heb. 12:26ff.] is in exact harmony with the one before us [Hag. 2:-6-7]. They both declare that God will unsettle and shake every earthly thing, private and public, that rests not on Himself, and is not identified with His kingdom on earth.⁷

William L. Lane explains that the shaking "is a metaphor for the judgment of God executed in history."⁸ This judgment, he further explains, "will have a discriminating function. It will remove some ('all that can be shaken') and allow others to endure ('what cannot be

shaken’).”⁹ Lane believes the concern isn’t on “the future of the cosmos but on the future of the new covenant community, which stands before the threat of divine shaking and the promise of divinely given unshakability.”¹⁰

Is it a removal or a transformation of the things that can be shaken? The word used in Hebrews 12:27, *metathesis*, can be translated either way, as Ellingworth points out.¹¹ The text remains consistent with the transformation of flour into a leavened state (Matt. 13:33), of the kingdoms being consumed and taken into the Kingdom of God (Dan. 2:44, Rev. 11:15, Ps. 87), so long as only unshakable things remain at the end of the process.

A SHAKING BY ANY OTHER NAME

You can find parallels and symbolic equivalents to this shaking elsewhere in Scripture. You see the idea represented by wind removing chaff from wheat in Matt. 3:11–12, and by fire removing dross from silver in Mal. 3:2–3. Consider how John the Baptist here puts forward his invincible postmillennial confidence in Christ:

His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor and gather His wheat into the barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire. (Matt. 3:12)

The phrase “thoroughly purge” is a compound Greek term, *diakatharisei*, denoting *complete and total cleansing* of the threshing floor: no chaff left, only wheat. Chaff, a shakable thing, will not abide (note the contrast in Psalm 1).

Jesus doesn’t delay to start winnowing for centuries, standing there just holding His fan motionless. The winnowing has been ongoing, and will fully purge the world of chaff. Daniel saw that the nations “became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth” (Dan. 2:35). The stone grows to fill *the whole earth* with no room left for anything else.

By the end of the winnowing, you’ll find no chaff (because “no place was found for them”): only the unshakable Kingdom remains. We therefore welcome it when the chaff is being driven, century after century, into oblivion. This is so the wheat may remain and the meek may inherit the earth. Small wonder that Isaiah indicts his people for the worst folly of all: “You conceive chaff!” (Isa. 33:11), i.e., lust after shakable things that Christ will blow away.

THE REFINER’S FIRE

We see *purging* as paralleling the *burning* of fire in Isaiah 4:4 when the Lord “shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning.” Malachi says that the Messiah “is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap: And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver” (Mal. 3:2b–3a). The dross corresponds to the shakable things, the purified silver to the unshakable things that remain. The Messiah continues to sit and purify the world of all its dross.

Vivid imagery concerning fire as a parallel to shaking appears in Isaiah 33, as F. F. Bruce notes.¹² We live in the midst of the shaking, we live in the midst of the cleansing of the threshing floor, and we live in the midst of the fire of God that is purifying the world.

George Adam Smith explains how deeply aware Isaiah was of the fire, the cleansing, and the shaking.

The justice of God, preached so long by Isaiah, had always seemed something abstract. Now they saw how concrete it was. It was not only a doctrine: it was a fact. It was a fact that was a fire. Isaiah had often called it a fire; they thought this was rhetoric. But now they saw the actual burning—“the peoples as the burning of lime, as thorns cut down that are burned in the fire.” And when they felt the fire so near, each sinner of them awoke to the fact that he had something burnable in himself, something which could as little stand the fire as the Assyrians could. There was no difference in this fire outside and inside the walls.¹³

What we need, then, is to see our world like Isaiah saw it—as it really is:

Isaiah ... likens the holiness of God to a universal and constant fire. To Isaiah life was so penetrated by the active justice of God that he described it as bathed in fire, as blown through with fire. Righteousness was no mere doctrine to this prophet: it was the most real thing in history; it was the presence which pervaded and explained all phenomena. Isaiah alone faced life with open vision, which filled up for him the interstices of experience and gave terrible explanation to fate. It was a vision that nearly scorched the eyes out of him. Life as he saw it was steeped in flame—the glowing righteousness of God. Jerusalem was full “of the spirit of justice, the spirit of burning. The light of Israel is for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame.” [Isa. 4:4 and 10:17]¹⁴

How can we survive the storms of life if we build on sand? Or survive the shaking if we refuse to stand with the unshakable Kingdom? How do we survive in the middle of the fire that Isaiah sees penetrating all reality? Smith points to Isaiah’s own answer to these questions:

Isaiah replied that there is one thing which can survive universal flame, and that is character: “He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of fraud, that shaketh his hands from the holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from the hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from looking on evil, he shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks; his bread shall be given him; his water shall be sure.” [Isa. 33:15–16]¹⁵

So not only should we invite the shaking, the winnowing fan, the refiner’s fire, and embrace the divine promise behind the shaking, we also receive practical wisdom from Isaiah.

Isaiah saw that with Assyrian and Jew another Power was present—the real reason of every change in politics, collapse or crash in either of the empires—the active righteousness of God. Assyrian and Jew had not only to contend with

each other. They were at strife with Him ... God’s justice is everywhere, pervasive and pitiless, affecting the combatants far more than they have power to affect each other.¹⁶

This is the basis of our confidence, because the shaking is *not* impersonal, abstract, or the result of chance. It is how God fulfills His promises to His people that they will inherit the earth while His government increases without end. Embrace these precious truths and gird your loins for victory. 🙌

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LURCHING FROM CRISIS TO CRISIS

BY MARK R. RUSHDOONY



Many of you will remember the heady feeling of the West when the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991. With no Cold War, and the United States “the world’s only superpower,” there was, briefly, very optimistic talk of a bright future ahead. Within a decade, however, the 9-11 attacks had shattered that optimism and it became obvious that new problems had merely replaced the old. The “dot-com” bubble and later the subprime mortgage/derivative bubbles burst. Three recessions have come and gone since we assumed the future looked so promising. We seem to lurch from one crisis to another. It comes from man playing god.

HUMANISM

As Christians we accept the Bible’s analysis of man’s problem being his sin. All sin repeats the attempt of Adam and Eve to make good on Satan’s con that they could “be as gods knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). Gods do not “know” good and evil intellectually, they determine it. This was Satan’s temptation to Adam and Eve. Their overt disobedience was eating the forbidden fruit, but the prior spiritual rebellion was that desire to play god, to assume His prerogative of defining good and evil.

Christian thought assumes a cosmic organizational chart that has God at the head and man and his world below. Whenever the authority of God and His Word is denied, whether in theory or in practice, the headship of that organizational chart necessarily becomes occupied by man in some way. We then have men illegitimately assuming the power that rightfully belongs to God alone. That, in a nutshell, is the blasphemy of humanism.

PLAYING GOD

Man is a creature of God and cannot transcend this reality, which is why Scripture reminds us repeatedly of what has been called the Creator-creature distinction. When we blur that line by acting like gods, by assuming the authority of God, we do not become god-like; we are only creatures making a mess of all we touch. Adam and Eve accomplished nothing positive by playing god; the lesson of Genesis 3 is that their course led to every misery known to mankind.

Have you ever wished you could intervene and stop one person or movement in order to make the world better? The disciples did. When the city of Samaria insulted Jesus they asked the Lord if they might call down from heaven destruction on the city (Luke 9:52–56). Jesus responded that His purpose transcended the understandable indignation of the twelve or the sin of the Samaritans. His purpose was to save.

Some years ago, there was a popular series of comedic movies called *Back to the Future*. They were about time travel, and the plot centered on the danger of changing one thing in history because the ripple effect would result in changing many things thereafter. It is that way when you try to play God. You cannot pick and choose specific acts of sovereignty; in order to really control like God, you must control everything. If you want power to change things at will, you need more than a few wishes, you need sovereignty. This is the realization of those that play at being gods. Unfortunately, it seldom humbles them into backing away from their presumption; it tends to make them hoard more power so they can control more. They become blinded by raw power, confusing it with authority because their cosmic organizational

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model has eliminated God, or at least reduced Him to a subservient role. When men assume sovereignty, they must reduce God to a role-player. When men believe they are in charge, then every problem is seen as requiring their intervention. “Something must be done.”

“THOU SHALT NOT . . .”

Because sin is, in its original and subsequent manifestations, the desire to “be as gods,” sinful men have been given commandments by God that limit their action. They are moral limitations, barriers we must not cross because we tend to play at being gods. Jesus made clear that these boundaries must be extended to include our thoughts and attitudes as well (Matt. 5:19–37). These boundary markers often begin with “Thou shalt not . . .” Just as most men were barred from the inner sanctums of the temple, we are given a boundary to our spheres of action. They are a divine command to “Stop right there.” Observing these limits keeps us from playing at being “gods knowing good and evil.”

Much harm comes from trespassing beyond God’s moral boundaries. The “pessimistic” view of man that the humanist belittles in the Calvinist is this perspective that man’s fundamental problem is a moral one. It is an offensive position to humanists. In college I took an ancient history course at a state university. It was an intensive summer course and the classes lasted for several hours each day. On the first day of class the first words of the professor asked a question—“Do you think man is basically good or evil?” When nobody spoke up, he pointed at me for an answer. Thereafter, for the duration of the course, no one wanted to agree with any statement I made because they could see I was speaking to a moral dimension they refused to acknowledge as relevant.

The harm men cause when they violate the boundaries of God’s law is systemic. It can be personal, but such evils create psychological, emotional, and economic results that become social.

Community is based on a *communion* of faith that shares a fundamental, *common* understanding of right and wrong. These religious assumptions form the basis of laws, norms, culture, and civilization. Will it be sin or righteousness that is institutionalized in the fabric of our culture? I remember as a teenager being told people with nothing in common could not easily discuss anything except sports and weather, but even sports has now created a tribal loyalty that makes its discussion more fruitful of argument than small talk. We have no community because, increasingly, we have fundamental conflicts.

When groups or organizations fail to abide by God’s boundaries, they also play at being god-like, yet with increased influence their harm is not only more extensive in influence but becomes institutionalized. This is true in churches, the state, corporations and private groups.

THE PROBLEM IS ILLEGITIMATE POWER

When Adam and Eve acted, they exercised an illegitimate assumption of power that caused great harm. It manifested itself in individuals and groups. Cain murdered his brother. His son “built a city” and within five generations a well-developed culture existed, complete with animal husbandry, music, and metallurgy, yet Lamech then bragged of his murder and threatened brutal retaliation on any who would avenge his actions (Gen. 4:16–24). The sin became systemic in the culture.

Man is not sovereign because he is a pretender on the throne of God. In high school I had a friend with a clearly Hispanic surname. When people asked his ethnicity, he replied that he was an Indian. When asked what kind of Indian he was, he would proudly declare himself to be a “Pseudo Indian.”

Man’s assumption of God’s prerogatives is also a sham, but it is no joke; it causes very real harm. Because man cannot be sovereign, his defiance of moral limitations only ends up expanding the

realm of sin and death. And so, we lurch from crisis to crisis.

We have built a Tower of Babel in one area after another. After the recession of 2008 almost took down the world banking system, many articles were written on potential triggers of another financial meltdown that could precipitate such an outcome. Many of these were not written from a hard money perspective, but they admitted to the fragility of our fiat money and debt structure. Unfortunately, most of these articles took such fragility as a normal consequence of modern economies. This lack of awareness of the consequences of our violation of God's commandments is a very real part of the mess we are in. Many will be blindsided when the follies of our economy are revealed.

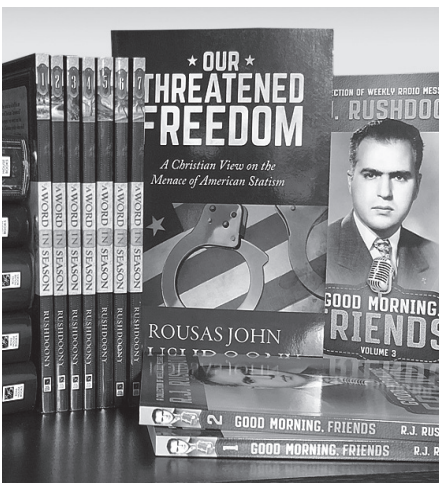
As tenuous as our economy is, we were blindsided by a virus, much like Herod Agrippa was struck down when he least expected it (Acts 12:1–23) or 185,000 Assyrians preparing to besiege Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:35).

Was COVID-19 created as a weapon? Was the reaction to it out of proportion to the threat? Was that reaction an opportunistic power grab? We will very likely never be able to prove any answers we might propose to these questions, but what we do know is that our institutions, our social order itself, is a house built upon sand. We do know that the systematic sin of the past and present have made

a multidimensional mess of things. When evil is so inter-twined at so many levels, reform seems less likely than a collapse and a total reconstruction. The seeming prosperity of evil doers is always precarious and never permanent.

The unseen and unpredictable factor is the miraculous moving of the Holy Spirit. As Christendom grew there was a very long trend toward limiting the power of men. It is entirely likely the growth of unbelief and humanistic statism is a temporary apostasy the Holy Spirit will reverse by an incredible spurt of growth in the Kingdom. The work of the Spirit in history is as efficacious as it is in regeneration. When the Spirit moves, change will take place. This was and is the meaning of Pentecost. The Spirit's work in history is described in Hebrews 12:26–27 as a “shaking” of the earth so “that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.” The prophets referred to such times as “the day of the Lord,” when God stops the folly of men and redirects history. Until that happens, we are just hanging on, lurching between one or another crisis, destroying ourselves by trying to “be as gods,” yet, like always, making a mess of everything we touch.

It will not last. In God's timing, His Kingdom will advance and overcome: “I will work a work in your days, *which* ye will not believe, though it be told you” (Hab. 1:5). 🙌



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