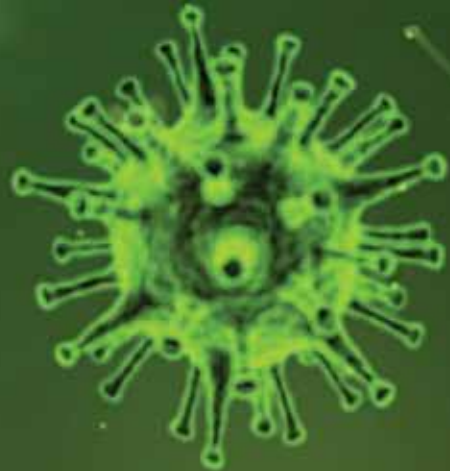
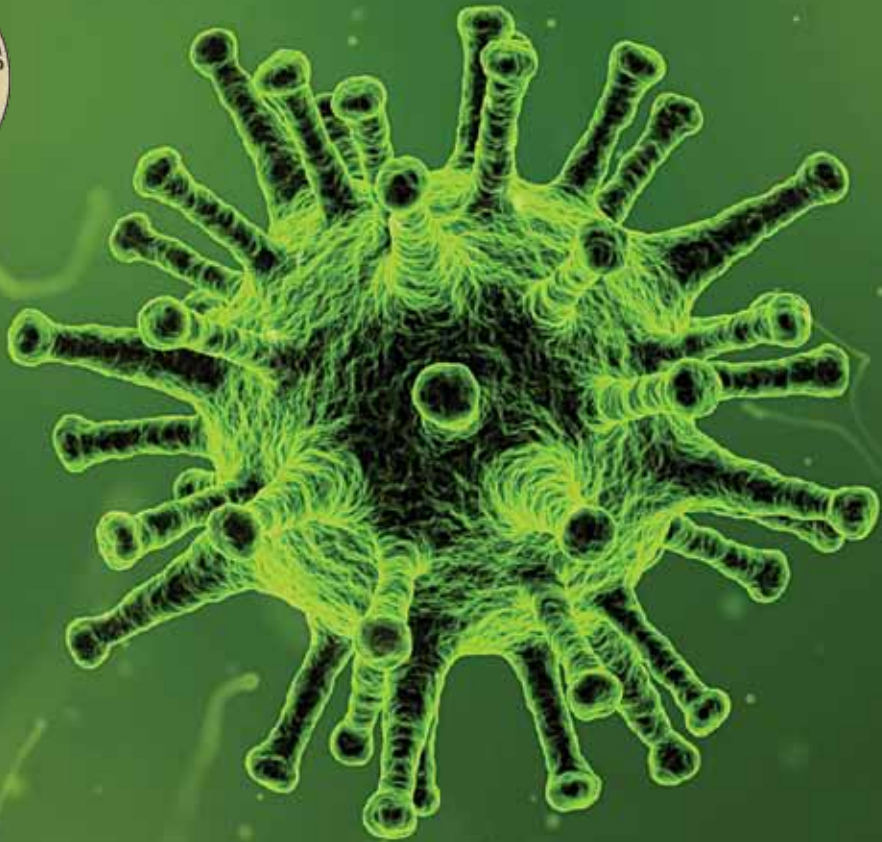


THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



VIRUSES & THE BUBONIC PLAGUE

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GOD'S SEARCH-LIGHT

“And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil.” - Zephaniah 1:12

“Where is God? His heavy hand of judgment didn't do this. His open hand of mercy will not deliver us.” Such practical atheism or deism extends far beyond the bounds of their theoretical counterparts and reaches into our churches and hearts. These thoughts also filled many in Zephaniah's day. Such thoughts paralyze prayer, repentance, and trust. How thankful we may be that God addresses them in our text!

Where He Searches

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah, who sought to reform God's covenant people. That timing makes Zephaniah's opening words a surprise: “I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD” (v.2). By land, he meant Judah and Jerusalem (v.4). Despite the reformations, storm-clouds of judgment hung over Judah (2 Chron. 34:24-25), because Israel still had the remnant of Baal, celestial worship, strange clothing, violence, and deceit (Zep. 1:4-9). At the root of these sins was that they had “not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him” (v.6).

A prayerless facing toward anything but God is so dangerous, but how will such people come to realize their danger? God says, “it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles.” He will house-search Jerusalem. Let us never think that God will only go to the world to find sin. The first place He inspects is His city Jerusalem as His church. As Peter declares, “judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17).

The Lord says He will visit every house from the royal palace to the poor rooms in narrow back-alleys. He will come with a candle to search what may be hidden away in dark corners. God's eye sees what we may have long ago forgotten in the attic of our past, in the hidden cellars of our mind and heart, and our public front porches. Now He searches and soon Jesus' words will be fulfilled: “For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known” (Luke 12:2). The Day of the Lord is near. If God does not uncover us now with His searchlight, He certainly will do so on that day! Isn't that reason to pray already now: “Search me, O God, and know my heart” (Ps. 139:23)?

What He Finds

When God searches His crowning work of creation, man, what precious thing does He desire to find? His image! When He searches His church,

what does He desire to find? The beautiful fruits of His ministry: repentance, faith, and fruitfulness. His candle will bring to light such graces. He will find and not let any of His jewels perish (Mal. 3:17).

However, God will also find those that are “settled on their lees.” The picture is of wine. Fresh grape juice was poured into jars or wineskins. To improve its quality, it had to be poured periodically from jar to jar, otherwise dregs or lees would form on the bottom and the wine would congeal or thicken. As God said elsewhere, “Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity; therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed” (Jer. 48:11). God’s searchlight finds wines left alone in dark places.

This description is of those who have gone through life without being shaken and overturned by God. They enjoy life, seem to coast along, and are spared from life-shaking upheavals. Of course, they have things to complain about and some days are better than other days, but life goes on quite normally. The worst is that they have never been shaken by the Word, emptied of themselves, and overturned spiritually. They live in the complacency of a false peace. Amos had to warn, “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion ... that lie upon beds of ivory ... and eat the lambs out of the flock ... that chant to the sound of the viol ... and anoint themselves with the chief ointments” (Amos 6:1-6).

This complacency is still such a danger in our western world and churches. We have lived so comfortably for such a long time. How many of us have been comfortable financially, valued social relations, enjoyed the pleasures and possessions of this earth, had a fine church life, and been comfortable spiritually, as we have lived rather content with ourselves?

The root of this complacency is that such “say in their heart, the LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil.” Rather than speaking to the Lord, they speak about Him. Maybe they don’t even speak out loud, but their lives betray the thoughts about God in their hearts. They look around and see deceitful people becoming rich and honest people suffering. They saw adulterers healthy and faithful people sick. They conclude God must not bother Himself with mankind. There is no use to seek Him and no reason to fear displeasing Him. He does neither good nor bad. He neither rewards good nor punishes evil. These practical deists say God may exist but live as if He does not rule over men.

This practical deism comes close to home. Many North Americans still believe there is a God or some higher power. But they do not recognize God’s hand in personal troubles or in a virus potentially affecting many. Maybe in a crisis they pray because they do not know what else to do, but they do not “believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11).

The greatest danger in this Covid-19 crisis is that society will only think horizontally about viruses, health, containment, quarantining, and cures; supplies and economic stability or loss; changes of plans, inconveniences and disappointments, or pleasant benefits from the government regulations, but will forget God. If God will be remembered, He will only be considered an emergency service to get us back on the track of the regular life of God-forgetfulness.

Even in the church, practical deism can be strong in those who still confess orthodox things. Let us search our hearts! How do we respond to this crisis? Is it with an eye above to the God who in His justice mingled with mercy sends judgments as calls to repentance? The God who in His fatherly love sends chastisement for His children’s good? The God of salvation from the worst plague of our hearts? And the God of mercy in the midst of every hardship? What fills our thoughts?

The Lord says he will “punish the men that are settled on their lees.” He will expose and punish the practical deism of complacency. How will such a life look when His light shines into the deepest recesses of our hearts in the “day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (Rom. 2:16)? That day is coming and that is why He warns about it.

“Woe to them that are at ease in Zion ... that lie upon beds of ivory ... and eat the lambs out of the flock ... that chant to the sound of the viol ... and anoint themselves with the chief ointments” (Amos 6:1-6).

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Why He Warns


God warns about His coming house-search so that we would set our house in order. Jerusalem was warned before God's judgments would destroy it. That judgment was only a foreshadowing of the great day of judgment when every self-satisfied sinner will be forever punished.

What a great warning that is for those among us and around us who are still living that way. Do not listen to your sinful heart that says: "God will not punish." Let God be true and every man a liar. The day is coming when these days of coronavirus fears will seem like bliss compared to the judgments the unconverted will then face. Let His judgments drive you to Christ for deliverance.

Oh, that the light of God's judgment would shine in our hearts even now! Christ has promised that the Holy Spirit will reprove the world of judgment in order to strip away all false peace, break all self-confidence, and stir sinners to flee to Christ for mercy. When God's light shines in us, we will confess: "God does indeed do good! He has been so very longsuffering toward me despite all the evil I have done!" Then we will be amazed we have been spared from so many worse sufferings and how much of His judgment He restrains in the present crisis. Then we will not be able to do without the Saviour whose life and heart the Lord's candle searched and found only what was to God's honor. He bore God's punishment so that God could do good to those who are not good. In Christ, we see God as the living God who acts in judgment and grace. Before Christ, every doubt whether God pays attention to man is swept away. Through Christ, we may know and live before God as the living God.

These warnings are also a cure for the doubts that may beset God's people concerning God's justice in this world and care for them. Asaph wondered whether God does good or evil, when he saw the wicked prosper and felt chastening every morning (Ps. 73). But when he saw the end of the wicked as desolation, he was delivered from his sinful thoughts.

If in this crisis you suffer as a believer or see God-fearing people suffer deeply and indifferent ones weather the storm without harm, remember that God's final judgment is not now, but on the final day. Then He will set everything straight. He will punish sin and do good to those who follow Him. Psalm 31:19 exclaims, "O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee: which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!"

Let us not be tossed by the waves of news which drive us to the cliffs of practical deism, but let us look above to the God who does good to those who seek Him and punishes the complacent. This crisis is a wakeup call that it is time to seek the LORD and that it is not vain to seek Him. He is the living God above all! 

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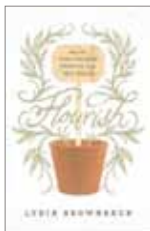
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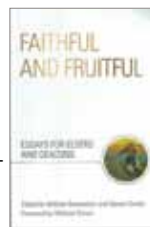
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GLOBAL DISEASE AND CHRIST'S VICTORY OVER DEATH

Recent news reports have been dominated by the cases of and fears for the global spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus). We are thankful for modern science as it seeks to provide cures and prevention of diseases, as well as those involved in disease control. We should pray for those who give themselves to this important work. At the same time, our hope should rest with the One who has paid the price for sin and conquered the devil and death in His death and resurrection. Those redemptive events secure and set in motion the final victory, which will culminate on the day that immortality will swallow up mortality. The whole of the Bible bears witness to this victory, but especially 1 Corinthians 15 celebrates exactly that in a most glorious way. Amid the fears and confusion regarding what is happening in our world, may our focus be upon the firm hope that the Christian has in Christ.

Living in Denial

Living in our fallen world, we have daily reminders that death is certain and life is not. Not only new viruses sweeping the inhabited world, but also other diseases, conditions, accidents, wars, and sufferings remind us that unless Christ returns very soon, we will all die.

Some try to escape the fear of death by living in denial. They act as if death is not coming or at least not coming soon. A version of this was present among the Corinthians. They believed that they had all the Christian faith had to offer now in the present. Through the influence of false teachers, some misunderstood the gospel to mean that if you were a Christian, you had already passed into the fullness of life and that there was no future event called the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12). The resurrection, so these people thought, was in the here and now. It involved living at some higher plane on which you could enter the fullness of life. For some, it involved that they could live as they pleased because the judgment had somewhat passed for them and they had their heaven on earth now (v. 32). They thought they should do as they wanted now, because for them it was inconceivable that there would be a future resurrection event. To them, the body was something to be despised and to be rejected.

“No so,” Paul countered. Christ rose with a physical body. Though Christians have spiritually passed from death to life (1 John 3:14), there is a future, a glorious future, in which the resurrection of the body will take place. “Then cometh the end” (1 Cor 15:24), Paul said to these people who imagined that the end had already come. It is as if he is saying:

“What you have now, if you are a child of God, is special. It is the beginning of eternal life in your heart and life. It affects your walk and talk. It will show itself in holy living in all areas of life, but don’t think that the end has already come and gone. The end is still to come.”

Entitled to Health and Wealth

This is an important reminder to us, especially when we still see so much disease and death around us. We have been taught the correct doctrines of the end of the world, the resurrection of the body, and heaven and hell, but too easily we imagine that it is on this side of eternity that we ought to soak up as much pleasure and happiness as we can. This lifestyle is not only found among those who espouse a health, wealth, and prosperity gospel. It is true of many who, with an orthodox doctrine in their creeds and confessions, still live under the spell of materialism, thinking that happiness is bound up with stuff or things that we can taste, touch, and handle. Others, both inside and outside the church, try to live “at a higher plain,” tapping into spiritual forces and consciousnesses that augment their sense of happiness, and they think this is life. The Corinthian spirit is alive and well in our Western world. Many “live it up,” while forgetting *the end*. However, the Word of God says loud and clear: “Then cometh the end.” Death and disease are reminders of our mortality and that we are here to prepare for eternity.

Living in a Fight

Christians are called to live strategically, that means, to live aware that we are in a fight. We have to contend with many enemies, both inside and outside of us. Sin is a great enemy.

The devil is an ancient enemy, and a great one. The world is also a sly but terrible enemy. Our own sinful flesh is such a strong enemy. False doctrine, false prophets, and hypocrites are terrible enemies. Every unconverted person is at enmity with God.

Yet, the Christian faith gives a perspective and hope through the resurrection of Christ. None can win against Him. He is putting enemies under His feet, all of them, without exception (Heb. 2:8). He does not do it all at once. He does it over time, over world history since the ascension. Psalm 110:1 records how the Father says to the Son: “Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” Every day, the glorious Son of God is dealing with His enemies this way, as He judges and consigns them to outer darkness one by one.

Disease and Death

We are thankful for existing cures and therapies for cancer, heart-disease, immune-deficiencies, and the many diseases that affect people from the cradle to their senior years. We hope for more such cures, also for this latest COVID-19 virus. However, disease is with us, and diseases bring death, which the Bible calls the “last enemy.” Compared to all the things the Bible calls God’s enemies, Christ allows death to go on the longest. Believers, you have suffered at the hand of this enemy, haven’t you? Death is not a friend, no matter what society is trying to lure us into thinking in its attempts to legalize euthanasia. When death takes your loved one, you feel the pain and hurt. That grief lasts long. This enemy is merciless and cruel. He strikes older ones and young people. This terrible enemy seems to have free rein. Why is this so?

Think of this parallel. Many military generals will keep back a very fierce brigade for the last segment of their struggle. They will hold them in reserve and call for them when everything else has failed. So too does Satan. He came on the scene first at creation, and he has devoured the whole human race by death with two exceptions – Enoch and Elijah. No, Christ “died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3). Through death, He defeated this last enemy, having tasted

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death for every one of His people, and delivers from death and the fear of death (Heb. 2:9-15). Because of that, even today, death must serve the purposes of Christ. Though it is the last enemy, it can only do Christ's bidding until at last that last enemy "shall be destroyed" (v. 26). Think of that reality. Imagine that sight! We will see the destruction of him who came into the world on the heels of our sin and because of it. Death will die! What it did to others, it will suffer itself. Death will be destroyed by the power of the risen and ascended Savior.

Fierce, yet Final

Savor that little word "last." A last enemy! Yes, he is fierce, but final. He is large, but last. His sting is already gone. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law (1 Cor. 15:56). But then he will be destroyed before the eyes of all.

Remember, child of God, that you are risen with Christ and that neither death nor life is able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:38-39). We don't need to fear death like the unconverted should fear death. Already now, people of God, Scripture says that death is "yours" (1 Cor. 3:21-22). You are not his, but he is yours. He is in the covenant of God, which is ordered in all things and sure (2 Sam. 23:5). Christ has made death a passageway into everlasting life (Answer 42 of the Heidelberg

Catechism). One day, your eyes will see death itself destroyed. Death will itself suffer defeat forever. No wonder the Bible says: "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18).

A Warning

If you are not in Christ, diseases and death should drive you outside of yourself to seek refuge in the one and only Sacrifice for sin forever. It is not enough to avoid getting COVID-19 or another disease. We don't just need cures for our body. We need the great Physician. Through the working of Holy Spirit, He gives faith and eternal life through faith. We all need Christ. Don't pretend that you will not face death. Remember, death is not your friend, if you are unconverted. It is a wage for your sin (Rom. 6:23). What will it be to be destroyed with death at the end? That involves not annihilation, but everlasting dying and never any possibility to live again. It will be eternal, irreversible separation from God, gnawing of conscience, weeping and gnashing of teeth, and no possibility of repentance and relief. Don't believe Satan's lies! Death is no serene end of all troubles. No, your real trouble will only be just beginning and never ending. Flee to the One who calls sick and weary sinners in the gospel today. ①

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THE GREAT PLAGUE OF LONDON

Occurring in 1665-1666, the Great Plague of London was England's last major epidemic of the bubonic plague. What we have witnessed so far in our Covid-19 crisis is only the sound of the rod compared to its smiting during this plague. What can we learn from this plague?

The Bubonic plague was produced by a bacteria likely carried by fleas and rats. Originating in China, it is thought to have travelled along the silk road and on ships to strike Europe with the "Black Death" starting in the mid-1300s. Estimates range from 75 to 200 million people dying from it or between 30% and 60% of Europe's population. Those who were infected often died within a few days to a week. The effects were profound. Who can describe the consequences of death for each of those who died, the profound scars of those who escaped the death that felled their loved ones, the economic impact of massive labour shortage, the persecution of groups thought to cause the plague, and many more effects?

This Bubonic plague continued to attack in random places throughout the subsequent four hundred years, making it one of the most devastating pandemics in history. After the Black Death of the 1300s, England was assaulted with many further outbreaks, including in 1535, 1543, 1563, 1589, 1603 (30,000 deaths), 1625 (35,000), 1636 (10,000), and ultimately in 1665-1666 in London. During an 18-month period, around 100,000 people, or up to a quarter of London's population, died. By this time, London had become a crowded city with poor hygiene in the poorer parts of the city. Only think of the dung, rubbish, and sewage in the open drains along the streets, inviting flies and other creatures.

At the time, doctors were uncertain about the cause of the



A plague doctor with a mask to prevent infection.

plague and had no cure. Ships coming from places where the plague had occurred, such as Amsterdam, were quarantined for 30 days. Ships could only travel up the Thames River to London if they had a certificate of health. That quarantine length was increased to 40 days shortly before the plague broke out and extended to ships coming from any Dutch port, despite the Dutch ambassador's objections to the economic impact on this decision. Those who came ashore without serving their quarantine time were kept for 40 days on shore.

Despite these precautions, the plague struck, beginning in the crowded streets where the dockworkers lived, and spreading throughout London. Efforts were made to close ale houses, limit the number of lodgers per household, and clean the streets, with increasingly heavy fines and punishments for noncom-

pliance. Travel within London was also limited. By the summer of 1665, people began leaving the city, beginning with the rich and followed by the poor. Health certificates were required to be allowed to leave. Soon the bodies of the dead began to pile up and large, mass graves had to be dug by hand. Panic struck. Thinking animals might be carrying the disease, cats and dogs were culled (which only encouraged the rat population). By late autumn of 1665, the death toll slowed. In February 1666, the King and his court returned to London, followed by the gentry and workers, as well as new faces seeking to fill the void left by those who died. By spring, the city was again bustling. Calamity broke out with the great fire of London in September 1666; however, that is another story. ①

Rev. D. Kranendonk is pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Oxford County.

A PASTOR'S EYE-WITNESS REPORT OF THE PLAGUE

Many Puritans ministered during the Great Plague. One was Thomas Vincent (1634-1678), a minister who was ejected from ministry in 1662 (along with thousands of other ministers). During the Great Plague of London, he lived, pastored, and preached among the dying. Seven of his own household died. He also witnessed the great fire a year later. In 1667, he wrote *God's Terrible Voice in the City*. Below is a condensed version of his survey of what occurred.

In the year of our Lord 1665, the Plague began in our City of *London*, after we were warned by the great Plague in *Holland* in the year 1664 and the beginning of it in some remote parts of our land the same year.

[May 1665 - The secure started]

Now secure sinners begin to be startled, and those who would have slept at quiet still in their nests, are unwillingly awakened. Now a great consternation seizeth upon most persons, and fearful bodings of a desolating judgment. Now guilty sinners begin to look about them, and think with themselves into what corner of the land they might fly to hide them. Now the profane and sensual, if they have not remorse for their sins, yet dread and terrors, the effects of guilt, they could not drive from them. If by company, carousing, and soft pleasures, they intoxicate and smooth their spirits in the day; yet, we may guess what hideous thoughts such persons have in the silent night, through fears of death which they are in danger of. Now those who did not believe an unseen God, are afraid of unseen arrows. Those which slighted God's threatenings of eternal judgments, do tremble at the beginning of His execution of a temporal judgment.

[June 1665 – The streets empty]

Now the citizens of *London* are put to a stop in the carrier of their trade. They begin to fear whom they converse and deal with, lest they should have come out of infected places.... Now many houses are shut up where the plague comes, and the inhabitants shut in, lest coming abroad they should spread infection. It was very dis-



Map of London in the 17th Century.

mal to behold the red crosses and read in great letters, *Lord have mercy upon us*, on the doors, and watchmen standing before them with halberts, and people passing by them so gingerly, and with such fearful looks, as if they had been lined with enemies in ambush, that waited to destroy them....

Now rich tradesmen provide themselves to depart. If they have not country-houses, they seek lodgings abroad for themselves. The poorer tradesmen stretch themselves to take a country journey, though they have scarce wherewithall to bring them back again.

[July – Terrible deaths]

Now the countries keep guards, lest infectious persons should from the city bring the disease unto them.... Now the arrows begin to fly very thick about their ears and they see many fellow-sinners fall before their faces, expecting every hour themselves to be smitten....

Especially when the disease hath invaded themselves; and first began with a pain and dizziness in their head, then trembling in their other members; when they have felt boils arise under their arms and in their groins; when the disease hath sent forth those spots which (most think) are the certain tokens of near approach-

ing death; now they have received the sentence of death within themselves, and have certainly concluded, that within a few hours they must go down into the dust. Their naked souls, without the case of their body, must make its passage into eternity, and appear before the highest Majesty, to render their accounts, and receive their sentence. None can utter the horror, which hath been upon the spirits of such, through the lashes and stings of their guilty consciences, when they have called to mind a life of sensuality, and profaneness, their uncleanness, drunkenness, injustice, oaths, curses, derision of saints and holiness, neglect of their own salvation; and when a thousand sins have been set in order before their eyes, with another aspect, than when they looked upon them in the temptation. What horror when they find God to be irreconcilably angry with them, and the day of grace over, the door of mercy is shut, and that pardon and salvation (which before they slighted) now unattainable; when the grave is now opening its mouth to receive their bodies, and hell opening its mouth to receive their souls! They apprehend, that they are now just entering into a place of endless woe and torment; and that they have foolishly been the cause of their own ruin.

[August - Funerals]

Now the cloud is very black, and the storm comes down upon us very sharp. Now death rides triumphantly on his pale horse through our streets and breaks into every house almost where any inhabitants are to be found. Now there is a dismal solitude in *London* streets. If any voice be heard, it is the groans of dying persons, breathing forth their last, and the funeral knells of them that are ready to be carried to their graves. Now we could hardly go forth, but we should meet many coffins, and see many with sores, and limping in the streets.

[September – Heaven and Hell]

When we hoped for a decrease, because of the season and the number gone and already dead; yet it was not come to its height. Now the grave doth open its mouth without measure. Multitudes! Multitudes in the valley of the shadow of death, thronging daily into eternity. Now the covetous and unjust, the malicious and cruel, the scoffers and profane begin to suffer the vengeance of eternal fire; and the ignorant person with the civil, who are unacquainted with Jesus Christ are not excused; yea the hypocrites, with all impenitent and unbelieving persons, are sent down to the place of weeping; and surely hell wonders to see so many come amongst them from such a city as *London*, where they have enjoyed such plenty of such powerful means of grace; and place is given to them, even the lowest and hottest, where *Judas* and others are of the chiefest note....

Yet Hell doth not engross all that die by the visitation. Some (though not the first or most) have room made for them in the mansions which are above. The plague makes little difference between the righteous and the wicked, except the Lord by a peculiar providence do shelter



Plague of London 1665 - Loading the dead bodies on a cart.

TEACHING POSITIONS

**REHOBOTH CHRISTIAN SCHOOL
(COPETOWN, ONTARIO)**

Invites applications for possible **ELEMENTARY, SECONDARY, AND EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT POSITIONS** for the 2020/21 school year

We are looking for qualified individuals with a vision for Christian education to join our committed, vibrant community of learners. We are a K-12 parent-run school serving the families of four local Free Reformed Churches and beyond. Located on a beautiful rural setting between Hamilton and Brantford, RCS has been blessed with a strongly supportive community, and since our inception in 1978, have grown to an enrollment of 380 students. Please send a cover letter, resume, statement of faith, and references, including a pastoral reference (teacher applicants are also asked to include a philosophy of education) to the attention of:

Adam Kloostra, Principal
198 Inksetter Rd

P.O. Box 70, Copetown, ON L0R 1J0
t. 905.627.5977 e. principal@rehoboth.on.ca
on.ca w. www.rehoboth.on.ca

HERITAGE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL invites applications for the following teaching positions for the current school year:

- PART TIME SECONDARY FRENCH TEACHER
- FULL TIME SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER (Beginning Dec. 2020)

PART TIME ELEMENTARY TEACHERS (Maternity Leaves March-June 2020)

- And the 2020/21 school year:
- POSSIBLE, FULL TIME ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY TEACHERS
 - POSSIBLE, FULL TIME EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS

HCS has 660 students from K to 12, a supportive Reformed Christian community, a cohesive, professional faculty and staff of 65+ persons, and beautiful, modern facilities.

We seek

- Qualified applicants who seek to serve Jesus Christ in the area of Christian education and who submit to Holy Scripture as confessed in the Reformed creeds
- Committed professionals who positively lead students to a life of dedicated service to our Lord
- Enthusiastic, dedicated rookies or seasoned veterans looking for a positive change

How to join us

Submit a résumé, a statement of faith, and references (including one from your current pastor). Teacher applicants, please submit your philosophy of education as well.

Please forward inquiries &/or applications to:

Mr. Brian Kemper,

Principal, Heritage Christian School
2850 Fourth Avenue, Box 400, Jordan Station, ON, Canada L0R 1S0
T: (905) 562-7303 • E: heritage@hcsjordan.ca • W: www.hcsjordan.ca

TEACHING POSITIONS

PROVIDENCE REFORMED COLLEGIATE
invites applications for 2019-20 or
2020-21 for

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

If you are an experienced teacher looking for a change or an enthusiastic new teacher seeking an opportunity to work in a close-knit and warm school community of students, parents, and teachers, we encourage your application. Providence is a Reformed Christian high school serving 100 students for more than 20 years in Komoka, a rapidly growing small town west of London. We assist parents in providing students a Christ-centred, student-oriented, and teacher-directed education. We are intentional in nurturing students in the fear and knowledge of the Lord, and we seek to equip them for a life of service in the Kingdom of God as ambassadors for Christ.

Please submit a cover letter, résumé, statement of faith, philosophy of education, and letters of reference (including one from your pastor or elder). Direct inquiries and/or applications to:

Mr. Mike Vander Deen,

Principal Providence Reformed Collegiate
93 Queen Street Komoka, ON N0L 1R0
519-471-0661
mvanderdeen@providencerc.com

PROVIDENCE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL FULL-TIME TEACHING POSITION

Providence Christian School is accepting applications for a

FULL-TIME POSITION FOR A JR. AND SR. HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER,

commencing August 10, 2020. Our main areas of need are Science and Math, with ability to teach in our P.E. program a definite asset. We are also accepting applications for a full-time Elementary School teaching position.

We encourage applications by enthusiastic, qualified teachers who submit to God's Holy Word, subscribe to the Reformed Confessions, are committed to educating children and youth for the formation of a distinct Christian worldview, and have a passion for Christian education.

Providence Christian School is a growing Christian school in Monarch, Alberta, a rural community minutes from Lethbridge. It has grades K-12 with over 150 students and with 11 FTE staff members.

PCS offers: a four-day school week, attractive working and living conditions, a growing, committed school community, and a dedicated team of teachers.

Suitable candidates are encouraged to electronically submit: a letter of application, a résumé containing three references, and a brief philosophy of Christian Education statement.

Application deadline is April 3, 2020.

For inquiries check out our website:

pcsmonarch.com or contact
the principal,

Mr. Hugo VanderHoek,

principal@pcsmonarch.com,
403-381-4418

HISTORY *Continued...*

some under His wing and compass them with His favour as with a shield, hereby keeping off the darts that are shot so thick about them. Not a few fearing God are cut off among the rest. They die of the same distemper with the most profane. They are buried in the same grave and there sleep together till the morning of the resurrection: but there is a difference in their spirits. Angels convey the souls of the righteous into the heavenly Paradise, the new *Jerusalem* which is above. There God is in His glory, the Lord Jesus Christ is at His right hand, the innumerable company of angels are about Him, and the spirits of all just men and women made perfect were before gathered. There is fulness of joy and rivers of eternal pleasures running about the Throne of God, the streams of which do make glad all the Inhabitants of new Jerusalem.

It was generally observed amongst us, that God's people who died by the plague among the rest; died with such peace and comfort, as Christians do not ordinarily arrive unto, except when they are called forth to suffer martyrdom for the testimony of Jesus Christ. Some who have been full of doubts, fears, and complaints, while they were well; have been filled with assurance, comfort, praise, and joyful expectation of glory, when they have lain on their death-beds with this disease. Not only more grown Christians, who have been more ripe for glory, have had these comforts: but also some younger Christians, whose acquaintance with the Lord hath been of no long standing.

[Fall – Ministers preaching]

Now faithful ministers are preaching, and every sermon was unto them, as if they were preaching their last. *Old Time* seems now to stand at the head of the pulpit, with its great *scythe*, saying with a hoarse voice, *Work while it is called today, at night I will mow thee down.*

Ministers now had awakening calls to seriousness and fervour in their ministerial work: to preach on the side and brink of the pit, into which thousands were tumbling; to pray under such near views of eternity, into which many passengers were daily entering, might be a means to stir up the spirit more than ordinary.

Now there is such a vast concourse of people in the churches where these ministers are to be found, that they cannot many times come near the pulpit for the press, but are forced to climb over the pews to them. Such a face is now seen in the assemblies, as seldom was seen before in *London*: such eager looks; such open ears, such greedy attention, as if every word would be eaten, which dropped from the mouths of the ministers.

How did they then hearken, as for their lives; as if every sermon were their last; as if death stood at the door of the church, and would seize upon them so soon as they came forth; as if the arrows which flew so thick in the city would strike them, before they could get to their houses; as if they were immediately to appear before the bar of that God, who by His ministers was now speaking unto them. Great were the impressions which the Word then made upon many hearts, beyond the power of man to effect, and beyond what the people before ever felt, as some of them have declared. When sin is ripped up and reprov'd, O the tears that slide

FOR REFLECTION: *Thomas Vincent's account of the plague gives food for thought:*

- Without despising the hand today, how thankful we may be that we have been spared from this degree of suffering!
- In what ways are pestilence and disease judgments of God? What reasons do we have to repent as nation, churches, individuals?
- The news reports are so different from this report because Vincent grapples with the reality that after death comes the judgment. What effect should this have on us?
- How does the reality that general judgments are God's means to usher His people to glory give comfort amid dangers of death?
- How does the weight of eternity make us value the ministry of the Word that we receive and stir us to spread God's word amid a dying people?
- How does this account give guidance for and encouragement in our prayers?



A pictorial broadside of 1665 from the Mudseum of London

down from the eyes! When the judgments of God are denounced, O the tremblings which are upon the conscience! When the Lord Jesus Christ is made known and proffered, O the longing desires and openings of heart unto Him! When the riches of the gospel are displayed and the promises of the covenant of grace are set forth and applied, O the inward burnings and sweet flames which were on the affections! Now I hope not a few were born again and brought forth. whereof some died by the plague with willingness and peace; others remain steadfast in God's ways unto this day. But convictions (I believe) many hundreds had, if not thousands, which I wish that none have stifled, and with the Sow, have wallowed again in the mire of their former sins. The work was the more great, because the instruments, which were made use of, were more obscure, and unlikely, whom the Lord did make choice of the rather, that the glory by ministers and people might be ascribed in full unto Himself.

[Deliverance]

Around the beginning of these ministers' preaching, especially after their first fast together, the Lord begins to turn His hand and cause some abatement of the disease. From 7,155 which died of the Plague in one week, there is a decrease to 5,538 the next at the end of *September*, the next week a further decrease to 4,929, and the following weeks 4,327, 2,665, 1,421, and 1,021 deaths. There was an increase the first week in *November* to 1,414, but it fell the week after to 1,050 and the week after to 652, and then to 333. The number of deaths lessened to the end of the year which totaled 97,306 deaths of all diseases.

[February - Return]

Now the citizens, who had dispersed themselves abroad into the countries, because of the contagion, think of their old houses and trades, and begin to return, though with fearfulness, lest some of the after-drops of the storm should fall upon them. O that many of them had not brought back their old hearts and sins, which they carried away with them! O that there had been a general repentance and reformation, and returning to the Lord who had smitten the city! The Lord gave them leisure from their trades, for the one necessary thing: to mourn for the sin, which brought the plague upon the city, and humbly and earnestly to seek the Lord to turn from His fierce anger. Had they done so, it might have prevented the desolating judgment by fire. But alas! How many spent their time of leisure in toys and trifles, at best about feeding and preserving their bodies, but no time in serious minding the salvation of their souls; and if some were a little awakened with fear, whilst the plague raged so greatly, and they looked upon themselves to be in such danger; yet when they apprehended the danger to be over, they dropped asleep faster than before. ①

TEACHING POSITIONS

OXFORD REFORMED CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Invites applications for the 2020-2021 school year:

- FULL-TIME ELEMENTARY TEACHERS
- HIGH-SCHOOL MATH & SCIENCE TEACHERS
- HIGH-SCHOOL ARTS & HUMANITIES TEACHERS
- SECONDARY CURRICULUM COORDINATOR

About us:

- An expanding student body of 350+ students from K to 12
- A dedicated, Reformed, parent-run school community
- New facilities in a rural setting in south-western Ontario (Mount Elgin)
- A unified, professional staff committed to a Christ-centered education

We are looking for enthusiastic, qualified teachers who have a passion for Christian education, and submit to the Holy Scriptures as summarized in the Reformed confessions. Seasoned veterans looking for a positive change, or young beginners looking to gain experience are encouraged to apply.

Applications must include a resume, statement of faith, philosophy of Christian education, and references. Email applications to **Mr. William Van Brugge** (principal@orcschool.ca). Visit our website (orcschool.ca), or come and visit our school: 333182 Plank Line, Mount Elgin, Ontario.

JORDAN CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Jordan Christian School is a learning community that embraces the God-glorifying calling of educating students for Christian service. Located in the heart of Niagara wine country near St. Catharines, JCS provides a JK-12 program that is actively taught from a solidly Reformed perspective, while preparing students with the fundamental skills for further learning. We are currently accepting applications for the following positions for the **2020-21 school year:**

- A PART- OR FULL-TIME ELEMENTARY TEACHING POSITION
- A FULL-TIME SECONDARY TEACHING POSITION
- A FULL-TIME EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANT

Please include with your application, your philosophy of education and statement of faith and send it to the attention of Mr. Paul Wagenaar at principal@ourjcs.ca.



NEO-CALVINISM'S BIBLICAL STORY LINE (2)

Last time we examined the neo-Calvinist concept of cultural transformation and the Christian's duty to be involved in that mandate. They state believers must play an active role in the story of Christ's work of restoring the creation ruined by sin, to its former glory. We are to be co-workers with Christ in that endeavour in obedience to the so-called cultural mandate of Genesis 1. However, we closed the article with warning that if we over-emphasize our involvement in this culture-redeeming work we may lose sight of our true calling in life, namely, to be or become pilgrims to heaven.

The Critique of W. H. Veema

Dr. W. H. Veema, late professor at the Apeldoorn Theological University, objects to the term "cultural mandate," because it does not take into account the work of Christ and puts us back at the starting line of history. "Our work," he counters, "takes place after Christ has brought about a decisive turn in world history. In the New Testament, the command to work is always issued on the basis of an accomplished salvation. The mandate is grounded in Christ's saving activity." Veema warns against the danger of being so preoccupied with culture and trying to "redeem creation" for Christ that our Christian life will lose its pilgrim character. "We must never forget," he writes, "the apostolic admonition that as believers in Christ we are first and foremost 'strangers and pilgrims on the earth' (Hebrews 11:13)." He then points to Calvin's emphasis on the pilgrim character of the church.¹

Calvin on Pilgrimage

Like Kuyper, Calvin saw the creation as positive, containing many good things which believers may enjoy. Yet, unlike Kuyper, who had a very positive view of the world and culture, Calvin was much more reserved. For the Reformer, culture was more a gift to be enjoyed than a mandate to be explored. "Culture may be enjoyed by us," he agrees, "but we should always remember that we are on our way to the heavenly kingdom. If we must simply pass through this world, there is no doubt we ought to use its good things in so far as they help rather than hinder our course."² Given the sinfulness of the human heart, Calvin was afraid of the danger of abusing God's good gifts. He cautions, therefore, against setting one's heart on the things of the world and urges self-denial and cross-bearing as essential. "God's people," he says, "have always been an afflicted and suffering people who enter into the kingdom of God, not with worldly ease and comfort, but with much tribulation and oppression."³

The Great Derailment

The fear of Old Calvinists concerning neo-Calvinism, namely, that it would result in fundamental changes in theology, has come to pass. Blaming Kuyper alone for this would be unfair. Many factors have contributed to the decline of

authentic Reformed theology. Karl Barth and others have also left their mark. But there can be no doubt that Kuyper's conception of common grace has had a negative effect upon theology, including the doctrine of salvation. Although it may seem wrong to mention Barth and Kuyper in the same breath because of the basic differences between these two theologians, some important aspects of their theology or philosophy link them together.

In the 1970s a Dutch theologian, Dr. W. Aalders, wrote a book titled *De Grote Ontsporing (The Great Derailment)*. He argued that the modern era witnessed a great derailment in Protestantism, and particularly in Reformed theology, which involved a radical shift of emphasis in theology. The Reformation theme of "Christ and the soul" shifted to modern theology's theme of "Christ and the world." Aalders then made the shocking statement that the two main instigators of this derailment were Abraham Kuyper and Karl Barth. Each of them furthered the shift from the deepest intentions of the Reformation to the radically different approaches of neo-Calvinism and neo-Orthodoxy respectively. The Reformers' emphasis on the salvation of souls was left behind in favour of a greater concern for and openness to the world.⁴

Although Aalders' thesis met with stiff resistance by Kuyper's defenders who condemned the book for an unhealthy world-fight mentality, the author's concerns were a valid warning to the Reformed community. According to Aalders, both Barth and Kuyper are responsible for a new and unbalanced interest in God's kingdom and the so-called Christian world- and life-view. True, the Bible has much to say about the kingdom of God, but a study of the Kingdom theme in the gospels shows the Lord Jesus stressed the need for personally entering the kingdom by the new birth and its fruits, repentance and faith (Matt. 4:17; 6:33; John 3:3-5).

Dr. Arie Baars on Kingdom Theology

In a speech to a gathering of Free Reformed young people in 1986, Dr. Baars, then pastor of the Dundas Free Reformed Church, offered this evaluation on the modern concept of the kingdom:

It is even quite difficult to find texts in the gospels relating to the universal aspects of this kingdom! The vertical dimension, that we can enter the Kingdom only by regeneration and faith, is painfully absent in much modern Kingdom-theology. All emphasis is on 'horizontal' duties and activities which Christians have to perform in this world. This is definitely unscriptural and therefore, unreformed... Does this mean that the Kingdom of God is limited to the Church and to per-

sonal salvation? Don't we have a calling in this life and doesn't the Word of God give instruction in all areas of our life? Is there not a biblical world and life view? There certainly is, but this is not the first and foremost element in the teaching of Scripture. The first calling is to be reconciled to God, to enter the Kingdom by repentance and faith: Seek ye first the Kingdom of God...! (Matt.6:33). However, if we by God's grace have entered the Kingdom, this will affect our whole life in all its aspects. True Christians will also affect the world in this sense that they become the 'salt of the earth' and the 'light of the world' (Matt. 5:13,14).⁵

The Christian's Dual Citizenship

According to Augustine, Christians live in two cities: the City of Man and the City of God. As dual citizens, we have dual responsibilities to both these realms. We may not withdraw into our comfort zones while ignoring the world around us.

Being citizens of God's City does not preclude a healthy interest in and concern for those with whom we share life in the City of Man. We have a calling to evangelize the lost, urging them to set their sights on the City that has foundations whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10). We also have a calling to help build a just society and to promote the common good. This includes getting involved in politics and cultural issues of the day. Here we think of Christian organizations as ARPA and CARDUS⁶ which seek to promote and apply biblical norms and principles to our modern secular society.

The question, therefore, is not, do Christians have a task in this world, but rather what is the theological basis for this task?

Kuyper's Doctrine of Common Grace

Abraham Kuyper has found that basis in the doctrine of common grace. He insists that without this doctrine Christians tend to isolate themselves from the world. If we only recognize particular or saving grace, we can only judge and condemn the world. This amounts to anabaptistic dualism. Only the doctrine of common grace gives us the right perspective on the world and our task in it.

Kuyper's conception of common grace rooted in the divine decree, enabled him to construct a system whereby God's plan for His creation is realized in time along a double track: the elect are brought to salvation by Christ as Mediator of redemption (particular grace) and the cosmos with all its potential for culture is unfolded by Christ as Mediator of creation (common grace). Such a conception could only lead to a very optimistic view of culture and the world.

According to Augustine, Christians live in two cities: the City of Man and the City of God. As dual citizens, we have dual responsibilities to both these realms. We may not withdraw into our comfort zones while ignoring the world around us.

We must acknowledge that Kuyper never lost sight of sin and its awful consequences for humanity and the cosmos. He deeply believed in the fundamental difference between common (non-saving) and particular (saving) grace. For Kuyper, Christ is sovereign over the whole domain of human existence. Most Christians will wholeheartedly subscribe to his famous statement that there is not a square inch in the world of which Christ does not say, "Mine!"

Many scholars believe that as time went on Kuyper's thinking underwent a subtle shift in emphasis which alarmed some and pleased others. Dr. Klaas Schilder of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Liberated churches), was alarmed. He wrote, "When Kuyper puts disproportionate emphasis on creation at the expense of redemption, on common grace at the expense of redeeming grace, he is moving away from Reformed orthodoxy."⁷

How Common Grace is Replacing Redeeming Grace

On the other hand, a contemporary Kuyper scholar, James Bratt, applauds the shift in focus from redeeming to common grace. For Kuyper, he writes, it was very difficult to sell an unsettling theory as common grace to a conservative, pietistic culture-avoiding Reformed community. How could total depravity be reconciled with the notion that the unconverted could perform good works after all? For more educated church members the doctrine of common grace offered a solution to a problem that had perplexed them since their student years. In Bratts' words:

How could the beauty of the [pagan] classics be defended in the face of theological strictures against the corruption of natural man? Now both Bible and Confession declared that Plato, Vergil, and all the rest merited study and respect. More generally, the doctrine gave orthodox rebuttal to those who pressed the antithesis of parochial pietism so far as to deny the obvious virtue and wisdom among non-Christians and thus bring down ridicule upon the faith.⁸

According to Bratt, common grace became the linchpin for Kuyper's new direction in Reformed theology:

Common *grace* honoured earthly existence by describing it in the worthiest terms of the orthodox vocabulary. It encouraged the redeemed to respect the good remaining in the world and to strive to augment it. Even more, it made many elements of human culture – institutions such as the law and the community, artistic, and technical ability, academic disciplines, and scientific methods – not just products but means of grace, instruments whereby God restrained sin and enabled men to try to develop creation as he had originally designed. Finally, it legitimized a certain amount of coopera-

tion between the redeemed and unbelievers on the grounds that to some extent they shared a sense of the good and therefore a common purpose.⁹

While Kuyper maintained the distinction between saving and common grace, not all his followers did. If some of his opponents saw his view of common grace contain a threat to particular grace, his followers were only too happy with it as an escape from what they thought was too rigid a view of the Christian's separation from the world. Common grace, for many, opened the door to worldliness.

Many of his followers have gone beyond Kuyper in that they left behind the distinction between particular and common grace and spoke of only one grace in which faith and repentance no longer play a major role. All they have left now is common grace. The only question that remains for them is how to find meaning and the relevance of "salvation" in this life in this world.

Ideas have consequences, intended or unintended. Foppe Ten Hoor, one of the ablest Secession theologians, who opposed Kuyper's ideas, understood this clearly. He had his priorities straight. If he and his fellow Seceders in the Netherlands and North America were more interested in promoting piety and preserving sound doctrine than in transforming culture and society, it was because they knew that the church cannot survive long without men and women who live close to God and walk in His truth (2 John 4). Godliness and experiential religion is the greatest need of the Church and the lack of it is the greatest cause of all its faults and problems.¹⁰ ①

(Endnotes)

- 1 W.H. Velema, *Ethiek en Pilgrimage* (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1974), 55.
- 2 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), III.x.1.
- 3 Quoted by C. Pronk. *F.M. Ten Hoor, Defender of Secession Principles against Abraham Kuyper's Doleantie Views*, 138.
- 4 W. Aalders, *De Grote Ontsporing*, 97-101
- 5 A. Baars, "What is Reformed Today?" in *The Youth Messenger*, Special Edition, n.d.
- 6 ARPA (Association for Reformed Political Action). Its mission is to educate and encourage Reformed Christian political action and to bring a biblical perspective to our civil authorities. CARDUS is a think tank seeking to promote and apply Christian social thought to our modern context.
- 7 Quoted by D. A. Carson, *Christ & Culture Revisited*, 215.
- 8 James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 20.
- 9 Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 20.
- 10 Pronk, *F.M. Ten Hoor*, 193.

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LESSONS TO LEARN BY GOD'S ROD OR THE RAGING PESTILENCE

Thomas Brooks stayed in London to minister during the Great Plague. While it was raging, he wrote what the Puritan Paperback version has entitled, The Privy Key to Heaven. He published it because he believed those suffering amid the plague so needed to engage in and be encouraged in private prayer. He prefaced this work with a letter to several ladies and their husbands who had suffered greatly during the plague. In it, he gave several counsels or lessons to be learned by God's Rod. Here are a few of them:

Get more weaned and more mortified affections to all worldly comforts, contentments, and enjoyments. A man never comes to experience so much of the emptiness, the nothingness, the uselessness, the vanity, the mutability, the impotency, the insufficiency, and the uncertainty of all worldly comforts and enjoyments, as when he comes to fall under the rod. The constant cry of the rod is, Be dead to the profits, pleasures, honours, and applauses of the world; be dead to relations, be dead to friends, be dead to everything below a living Jesus.

Get assurance of greater and better things than any this world doth afford (Heb. 10:33-34). That saying is as true as it is old, namely, that the assurance of an eternal life is the life of this temporal life.

Humbly kiss the rod, and patiently and quietly lie under the rod, till the Lord shall either give you a gracious or a glorious deliverance from it. What is the rod, and what is the raging pestilence, to the horrors of conscience, and to the flames of hell, or to an everlasting separation from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power (2 Thess. 1:8-9)? Therefore, put your mouths in the dust, and be silent before the Lord. He that hath deserved a hanging, if he escape with a whipping, hath no cause to murmur or complain; and we that have deserved a damning, have little cause to murmur or complain of a whipping, yea, though it should be with a pestilential rod.

Make God your habitation, your shelter, and your refuge. Ponder seriously upon those scriptures:

Ps. 91:2,9,10; 90:1; 71:3; 57:1. They dwell most safely, most securely, most nobly, who dwell in God, who live under the shadow of the Almighty, and who every day lodge their souls in the bosom of eternal love.

Set up God as the great object of your fear: Ps. 119:119-120 ; Isa. 8:7, 8, 13, 14. When the judgments of God are either threatened or executed, feared or felt, it highly concerns us to lift up God as the main object of our fear. We should fear the hand that lays on the rod, more than the rod itself, Job. 13:11, Jer. 36:24. When God takes up the rod, when He draws His sword, and when He shoots His pestilential arrows amongst us, oh how highly doth it concern us to fear before Him with a child-like fear, with a reverential fear, with a fear that fortifies the heart against sin, and with a fear that fits the soul for duty, and that draws, yea, drives the soul to duty.

Expect God's singular presence with you, and his admirable protection over you. Consult these scriptures: Isa. 43:2; Dan. 3:24-25; Gen. 39:39-40; Ps. 23:4-5; Ps. 91; Isa. 63:9; Isa. 26:20-21; Ezek. 9:4, 6. God is above His people and beneath them (Deut. 33:25-27). He is under them and over them (Sol. 2:6). He is before them and behind them (Isa. 52:12 and 58:8). He is on the right hand of His people, and He is on the left hand of His people (Ps. 16:8, 121:5, 118:15-16; Exod. 14:22,29). God is round about His people (Ps. 34:7, 125:2). And God is in the midst of His people (Zech. 2:5; Ps. 46:5, 12:6). Oh, the safety, the security of the poor people of God! For God is above His people and beneath them, He is under them and over them, He is before them and behind them, He is in the front and in the rear, and He is round about them and in the midst of them.

Live every day in a fresh, choice, and frequent exercise of grace. Consult these scriptures: Ps. 91:2-4; Jer. 39:17-18; Micah 7:7-9; Ps. 40:1-2; Hab. 2:1-4 ; Jer. 30:21. That man that lives daily in an exercise of grace, that man lives every day in heaven on this side of heaven, whatever affliction or judgment he is under. ①

Taken from The Works of Thomas Brooks, vol. 2 (London: Nisbet, 1866), 139-161.



SCRIPTURE SATURATION

Speed wins the blue ribbon for being the premier virtue of modernity. People will pay high premiums to accelerate the pace of life when using their cell phone, ordering their food, and traveling abroad. Fast is fashionable. The all-consuming lust for speed, however, caters to instant gratification and undermines weighty pursuits. It carries a hidden cost, a price tag that few would be willing to pay in many situations. And we know it. Who would urge a surgeon to cut corners during a critical surgery, or a spouse to abbreviate their words about a life-altering decision, or an engineer to truncate designs for a skyscraper? Likewise, we understand that gaining proficiency in a skill requires sustained concentration over time. A classical cellist, a professor of mathematics, and an expert stone mason can only develop mastery through countless hours of painstaking labor.

Despite the obvious need to slow down on important matters, the unrelenting demand to ‘hurry up’ continues to berate us. And that impulse shapes our approach to life. When applied to our spiritual walk, the consequences prove catastrophic. What is more important than care for the soul? And what is more indispensable to biblical piety than time in the Word? Speed is incompatible with devoting ourselves to study of the Scriptures. The number of minutes in a day has remained the same since the beginning of the world. Trendy timing-saving techniques simply reallocate where we invest our minutes. God requires us to give an account for this expenditure – and its return in dividends.

God calls the Christian to be saturated with Scripture. That means soaking ourselves in the Bible, not scurrying over it. Whereas a plot of ground will shed most of a torrential downpour, the same sod will drink in several days of gentle rain, thereby drenching every porous crevice deep below the surface. Scripture saturation entails devoting significant time to focused study, with the aim of mastery, and carrying God’s Word with us throughout the day.

The following points of practical counsel aim to help believers immerse themselves in the Bible. Alternating different approaches during different seasons will bring out a rich diversity in what we glean from Scripture. We need to read deeply (small chunks in detail) and widely (large sections in their entirety). Both approaches require time; they defy the incessant nag to rush.

1. Pray before you read.

“Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Ps. 119:18). Pray as you read – in the face of God’s presence – and “receive with meekness the engrafted word” (Jas. 1:21). Then allow the text to serve as a springboard to guide and enrich



your supplications, as a means of soaking further in the text. Insights will come out of the passage as you employ the wording to shape the content of your prayer. Finally, carry Christ, revealed in that portion, with you throughout the day in your praying without ceasing (1 Thes. 5:17).

2. Pick one verse from your daily reading and chew on it all day long.

Make this a habit. What does it reveal about God, Christ, gospel, or law? What promises, warnings, exhortations, comforts, convictions, or doctrines does it teach? What particular sins does it expose in me? What light does it cast on my present circumstances? How does it apply to my thinking, emoting, conscience, practice, or relationships?

3. Read a whole book of the Bible in one sitting and take time to note the themes and sub-themes throughout.

What are the recurring words and concepts? Are there close connections to other books of the Bible? What was the historical context?

4. Pick one book of the Bible and read it slowly over several days or weeks, pausing to study verses and chapters in-depth until you attain a thorough grasp of its message.

Be sure to ask, “What does it mean?” before you ask, “What does it mean for me?” You could use a commentary, while focusing on the text, if that would help.

5. Pick a topic and explore it from Genesis to Revelation, seeking to extract all that God has revealed on that matter.

Do this over a predetermined season little by little each day. To make it more manageable, explore one theme throughout the whole book of Psalms (e.g., the kingship of Christ, conviction of sin, adoption, Christian joy, election, holiness of God, etc.).

6. You cannot reach saturation without retention.

God’s truth must lodge in your soul rather than simply pass through you. Memorization makes it stick in your mind. So, commit a section or chapter to memory and focus your mental energies on meditation. Then supplement that with reading elsewhere in Scripture. Often your meditation will cast light on what you read elsewhere, and what you read elsewhere will aid your meditation.

7. Meditation consists of more than mental rumination. It also engages the mouth.

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night ...” (Joshua 1:8). The Psalter opens with instructions to delight in the Word through meditating on it (Ps. 1:2). Singing the Psalms throughout the day fulfills these directives and enables the Word of Christ to dwell in you richly (Col. 3:16).

8. Since writing often crystallizes your thoughts, chronicle your reflections and meditations on your daily Scripture reading with a journal.

This provides the additional benefit of aiding review. You can go back over and over again and profit from what God was teaching you that day. I first watched my Dad do this year after year throughout my childhood.

9. Go to bed with your Bible. Wake up with your Bible.


Murdoch Campbell, a 20th century highland Free Church minister, would lie down every night and drift off to sleep mulling over a stanza from the metrical Psalter. When he roused to consciousness in the morning, he would immediately latch onto another text to fill his first waking thoughts. These bookends can sometimes bring the benefit of permeating a person’s dreams with spiritual reflections – a notable windfall when we recall that we spend roughly one-third of every twenty-four hours asleep.

Scripture saturation clashes with a sound-bite-society, and the Lord permits no peace treaty for ending the conflict. Shortcuts do not exist. This requires time, concentration, and deliberate pursuit. May the Lord make us, like Apollos, “mighty in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24), following the example of the Bereans, who “received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11). ①

Rev. Robert McCurley is pastor of Greenville Presbyterian Church which belongs to the North American presbytery of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). Taken with permission from the website of Grange Press, an initiative of this presbytery, <https://www.grangepress.com/2019/02/20/scripture-saturation/>. As an aside, this Press is currently involved in translating and publishing something from “our” Rev. Hendrik de Cock.

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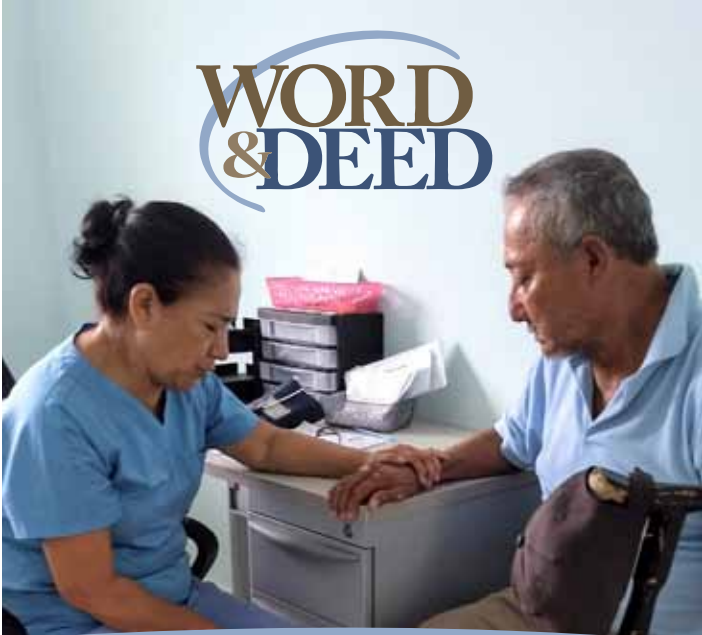
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WAVES OF EXODUS 5:

THE EXODUS OF THE CHILD JESUS

READ: MATTHEW 2:1-23

The Exodus theme is not just an Old Testament theme. The New Testament picks up the theme on its earliest pages and develops it further, as we will see in our next studies. This time, we wish to see how the Exodus marked the first years of Christ's life on earth, especially as we see it announced in Matthew 2:15b, which is a quotation from Hosea 11:1b: "Out of Egypt I have called my Son."

A Scriptural Pattern

Matthew has already established a close connection between the Savior and the Old Testament in his first two chapters. The genealogy (vv. 1-17) traces the history of the Old Testament from Abraham to Christ through names. Matthew quotes the prophet Isaiah to explain why Jesus will be called Emmanuel (1:23) and throughout chapter 2, Matthew frequently quotes the Old Testament (2:5, 6; 17-18; 23). Matthew was keen to show how Christ was fulfilling Scripture at every point. He was the One to Whom all of Scripture pointed, and this includes what the Lord was saying when Israel came out of Egypt (Matt. 2:15).

The immediate context is the visit of the Magi, or the wise men from the East (2:1). These were part of the wise men class that advised kings as you can read of in Daniel (e.g., Dan. 2:12-14, etc.). In fact, the notion that a King would be born in Judea may have been nurtured in these circles because of the influence of and prophecy of Daniel in Babylon. At any rate, these wise came to Jerusalem desiring to know where the King was that had been born. As Isaiah foretold, "Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isa. 60:3). Everything seems turned upside down. The scribes know where Christ is to be born (2:5), but no one seeks Him except the Gentiles (2:9). In addition, this time, it is not the Egyptian king, Pharaoh, who wants to kill baby boys so as not to lose his kingdom. Instead, God's Son has to leave the land of promise to Egypt to be safe.

Warned by an angel of God, Joseph took Mary and the child to Egypt to escape this murderous plot (2:13). Egypt would house the Lord Jesus for a time, in order that the Lord Jesus would also come out of Egypt, like Israel had many centuries before. All this would fulfill the Word of the Lord in Hosea 11:1, where God says, "[I] called my son out of Egypt."

A Powerful Call

The idea of God's Son being in Egypt is not new to Hosea 11:1. Already back in Exodus, God said: "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn" (Ex. 4:22). To Pharaoh, Moses was to say: "Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn" (Ex. 4:23). What God was doing in the Exodus was calling His son, His firstborn, out of captivity, in order that Israel would be free to serve Him, their Father, in the wilderness.

The Exodus was nothing less than God's call effecting the freedom of His Son. His call draws irresistibly. Even when Israel resisted its own freedom by murmuring and complaining against Moses, God's call prevailed, and Israel came out.

You know the saying that though Israel was taken out of Egypt, this did not mean that Egypt was taken out of Israel. As Israel left Egypt, never to return, they took part of Egypt with them. From early on in their national history, they would show themselves as less than the ideal son of such a gracious and redeeming Father. Over and over, they would need to be called away from living as Egypt lived, worshipping as Egypt worshipped, and thinking as Egypt thought.

God will continually call them out of Egypt. That call, Hosea says, will be more like a roar: "He shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west. They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: And I will place them in their houses, saith the LORD" (Hos. 11:10b-11).

The return of the exiles to their native land would be a first fulfillment of the prophet Hosea's words. And yet, as is often the case in Old Testament prophecy, a greater and deeper fulfillment would follow. You see, all would not be well after the people were allowed to return to their own land. Their troubles would not all be behind them. Sin would still show itself among the people of God. Idolatry would still rear its head. They would need a more spiritual, a more spectacular, a more decisive Exodus. And, in our Bibles, we need to flip forward only about 50 pages from Hosea to the book of Matthew, to see this happen. You can find Hosea's own words quoted there again: "Out of Egypt have I called my son". As they are fulfilled there, they take on a deeper, more amazing level of significance.

An Obedient Son

If you had been assigned to border patrol on the western border of Egypt during these early days of Christ's life, you might not have

noticed what happened when a plain-looking Jewish couple with a toddler left your country one night shortly after Herod's death. Perhaps they looked obviously foreign and spoke a foreign language. Little would anyone who watched Mary, Joseph, and Jesus cross the border out of Egypt know that that Child with that humble couple would change all of history. That Child would not only influence His own country, but He would open the gates of heaven and defeat the forces of hell, orchestrating the greatest deliver-


ance of all times which would transform human hearts everywhere. God was fulfilling His purposes, even the pattern of the whole of the Scripture. Matthew writes: "That it might be fulfilled" (Matt. 2:15). Christ fulfilled all obedience to the divine law.

How fitting it was that no pomp or circumstance attended Jesus that night as He came out of Egypt. After all, there was none to accompany His birth, either. And that would prove to be how things would go in this Son's life. There would be no pomp and circumstance during His childhood in humble Nazareth, or as He began His work in carpentry. As He began His ministry, He would go unnoticed by many. There would especially be no pomp and circumstance when Christ would ultimately descend into the Egypt of death, on the cross of

Calvary. All that He did, He did that He "might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14-15).

Christ's obedience to His Father's call continued throughout His life here on earth. The Son's ears are always open to the Father's voice. The communication between them was never challenged. He always listened to and obeyed His Father. He always did what pleased Him (John 8:29).

Do you see why the exodus of the young Christ from Egypt was a decisive one? Rather than staying in forced exile in Egypt because of Herod's envy, Christ was called back by His Father, to grow up and begin His ministry, to suffer and die in obedience to His Father's call. His perfect service to His Father in all of these things purchased for His people everything they need, also to leave Egypt behind and serve the Lord.

As we will see in our studies to come, the call out of Egypt comes to all of us: "Come out of her, my people; that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4). We can only obey this call through Christ Who strengthens us, for He came out of Egypt upon the call of His Father. In Christ alone there is true freedom from all bondage. 

QUESTIONS

- 01** Trace the humiliation Christ endured as He left the promised land to go to Egypt. Compare how willing Christ was to go into bondage when we, apart from the call of God, don't want to leave it.
- 02** Why can Israel not be its own Messiah? Why was their coming out of Egypt not enough? What does this mean for religious people, who think Christ just needs to help them with the final stretch, not do their life over again?
- 03** Many young people complain that their father doesn't speak with them, and indeed, many fathers don't call their children out of the service of this world to the service of God. How can God's call to His Son be an example for Christian fathers/parents?
- 04** How are we called still today to come out of Egypt (1 Pet. 3:13-14; Rev. 18:4)?

ReSET: LIVING A GRACE-FILLED LIFE IN A BURNOUT CULTURE

by Dr. David Murray. Published by Crossway, Wheaton Illinois, 2017. Softcover, 206 pages.

Dr. Murray's book has been widely read and has been available for several years. However, I never gave it a thorough reading until I recently noticed there is a Dutch translation of this book, reviewed in the *De Wekker* (January 31, 2020), a publication of our sister churches in The Netherlands (CGK). The reviewer, Rev. P.W.J. van der Toorn of Bunschoten, describes the book as a remarkably "stunning" and "excellent book!" He calls it a book "full of grace, full of practical, spiritual wisdom and full of tremendous insights," which will stimulate men (and women) to focus on the God of grace and the compassion of Christ through Whom alone true rest and joy is to be found. Although this book is "addressed to Christian men in general," with a "focus upon Christian ministry leaders," Murray includes women and states: "if you want to understand your husband better and help him live a grace-paced life, keep reading..." (p.16). Note that his wife, Dr. Shona Murray, has co-authored with him a complementary book for ladies entitled *Refresh* (Crossway 2017), drawing on her experience as a medical doctor who went through a period of exhaustion, depression and anxiety.

In his Introduction to *Reset*, the author points out that we live in a fast-paced society. We can also "waste our life" (John Piper) by neglecting to seek the Lord. But we live in a culture that pressures us to keep close to our smartphones, even while asleep. This reality led Murray to claim that we live in a "burnout culture," to which especially pastors, but many in this fast-paced culture, are prone. Are we aware that we may be overstepping God's precepts and boundaries by being emerged in a frenetic life-style? Maybe we won't suffer "burnout," but we may not pay enough attention to ingrained practices that cause depression, listlessness, a flat spiritual life, and poor control of our emotions in situations that face us in our marriages, families, work, and even church life.

Murray is candid about his own experience as a near-casualty of burnout and suffering two life-threatening bouts with pulmonary blood clots. He learned the hard way and had to recognize that we are finite creatures and must yield to our need of regular rest and renewal if we are to be faithful in carrying out

the responsibilities God has entrusted to us.

Throughout the book, Murray quotes many statistics to support his claims. What makes this book so convincing is that he points us to both special and general revelation: biblical precepts and the sciences -- statistics based on research to which we have access today. For example, "burnout is responsible for 20 percent of all pastoral resignations" (p. 11). Time and again Murray shows from the Bible and scientific sources that often these two sides of God's revelation come to the same conclusions (cf. p. 182). The reader will be surprised how much the Bible has to say about living what Murray calls a "grace-paced life-style."

The book is an easy-read, filled with personal examples and interesting stories, sprinkled with witty and humorous remarks. Murray uses the framework of an automotive repair shop through which he guides the reader into a series of "Repair Bays."

- Repair Bay 1 (Reality) is the primary diagnostic chapter, which gives a detailed checklist of "warning lights" and a method to evaluate our life situation.
- Repair Bay 2 (Review) reviews the interrelated and limited nature of our

bodies, minds, and souls.

- Repair Bay 3 (Rest) explores the fundamental importance of caring for ourselves by getting proper sleep (turning to the Lord before turning to sleeping pills).
- Repair Bay 4 (Re-Create) offers a brief theology of the body (1 Cor. 6:9-20), connecting our physical need of manual activity and exercise. True, some famous Christians slept very little because of their dedication to the Lord's service. "What is not said is that many of them suffered horrendous ill health and not a few died quite young" (p. 69), thus shortening their time of service.
- Repair Bay 5 (Relax) describes how daily, weekly, quarterly, annual, and seasonal periods of relaxation and rest are essential, referring to God's example of instituting a weekly day of rest and taking time off (as our Lord did) for meditation and prayer.
- Repair Bay 6 (Rethink) takes up the issue of the way we think



of ourselves and setting priorities. I am a sinner. Am I in a right relationship with God and is living for God's glory a priority? Are we characterized by sinful thoughts and activities, or even legitimate ones in excess?

- Repair Bay 7 (Reduce) has the reader take stock of his time and talents, asking the Lord what He will have us do. What is our purpose regarding our spiritual development, marriage, family life, and Christian service? This may mean saying no to some opportunities or requests.
- Repair Bay 8 (Refuel) considers the effect of food and proper diet. It offers a helpful section on mental health and medication. First, seek spiritual help and don't rush to medication, but don't rule it out either, and don't wait too long. Don't expect rapid results and don't rely on medication only. Be prepared for side effects, and don't obsess about getting off meds or come off them too rapidly. Don't be ashamed, because meds are a good gift of God.
- Repair Bay 9 (Relate) explores the significance of relationships. It is not good for man to be alone (Gen.2:18). We need the Lord first of all, but also spousal support, family, friends and the church and its spiritual oversight.
- Bay 10 (Resurrection) concludes the book by offering a vision of the new perspectives the grace-paced life can provide, even when encountering crisis situations and when we stumble and mess up.

Of course, no book can provide a one-size-fits-all treatment that applies equally to every conceivable situation. But regardless of one's vocation, Reset offers considerable help for everyday living. It is filled with numerous nuggets of practical advice from the Bible, supported by scientific research and practices. It is truly a grace-filled book because Murray shows how God provides for all our needs. There may be those who think they already know much of what is written and have worked through life's problems, leaning on the God of all grace. There may be some who did not follow God's precepts for practical living because they have a stronger constitution than others, and survived very well – but that is also God's grace. ¹

A free Study Guide is available: <http://headhearhand.org/uploads/2017/12/171212-Reset-Discussion-Guide>.

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