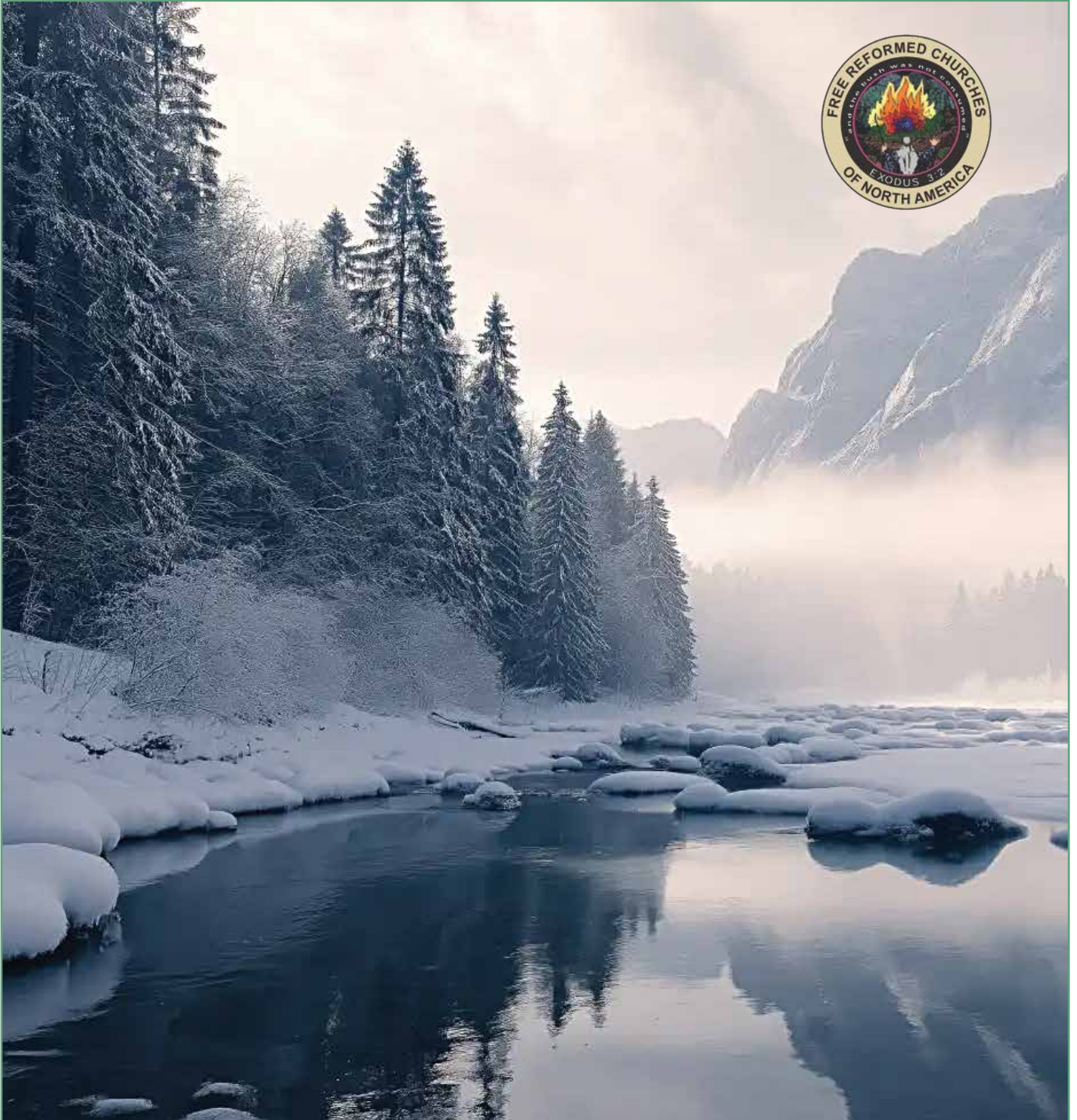


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THE MESSENGER

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02 MEDITATION:
DANIEL FOUND
PRAYING

06 EDITORIAL:
THE CALLING TO
GOSPEL MINISTRY

14 INTERVIEW SERIES:
AN INTERVIEW WITH
STUDENT FLORIS VISSER



DANIEL FOUND PRAYING

“Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.” Daniel 6:11

What does the world find us doing when it looks at us? Here in our chapter, the world finds Daniel bowed down, praying and making supplication to His God. Daniel cannot leave his place of prayer to God empty.

How precious is communion with God to you? Can you miss it? How dispensable is it to you? To a formal Christian, not to pray may unsettle his or her conscience, but to the flesh it is actually easier. Prayer is a wrestling. Prayer is communing with the Holy One on the basis of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is loathsome to the natural man, but it is an absolute necessity and inestimable blessing to the spiritual man.

Prohibition

Often, the children of the world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. They realize that they should get people to stop praying to God. In an almost Satanic way, they are scared of people praying and thus they outlaw it, or get people to feel ashamed of prayer, or pray so generically that this prayer could be prayed in any place and not offend anyone. That means in a certain sense that the world believes in the power of prayer and tries to stop it. Indeed, the devil knows that he has only a short time. He knows it would be a success if he could extinguish the fire of prayer.

In prayer, we look up to God, who dwells in the heavens, until He has mercy upon us. In prayer, we lift up our empty hands before the Lord, who alone can fill them. In prayer, we come, believing that God is and that He is the Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. In prayer, we confess our sin to God, who promises to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. No wonder Satan, the world, and our own evil heart hate prayer.

Perseverance

Darius and his men probably stopped a lot of people from praying. For them, prayer was just a custom, and a law and a threat of reprisal can stop a custom.

But a threat, and a law, and persecution cannot stop a child of God from calling upon His God.

Daniel did exactly as always. He knelt before God. He prayed and made supplication before God. That’s what the world says when they looked to see if this man would also stop. They saw a man who feared God rather than man. That was wisdom.

If anything, the prohibition had probably multiplied Daniel’s prayer, because he may have needed more strength, more

courage, more faith to put any unbelief to death. And how else can you do that than by prayer?

And Daniel did not hide behind closed doors and drawn curtains. Daniel opened the windows! From the outside, the people could see him when he knelt and prayed. The great statesman Daniel was small before His God.

What Daniel prayed, we don't know precisely. He probably prayed much like he did in Daniel 9. There he prayed confessing his people's sin as his own. He prayed for the covenant people, Israel, and the city of Jerusalem. After all, he faced in that direction (Dan. 6:10), towards the place where once the altar of the burnt offering had stood. He pleaded on the promises of God in faith, seeking the fulfillment of them. To not pray is to wish ruin upon the world.

Like Moses, Daniel saw Him that was invisible (Heb. 11:27). A small comparison is a student that sees the teacher standing looking in from the hallway into the classroom while other students are mocking the teacher thinking he or she is absent. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). How would I not pray when the almighty and everywhere presence of God sees and knows everything? Daniel understood Romans 8:38-39: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Faith, which has its origin in God, will persevere. Faith takes into account that the Lord may choose to intervene to stop the threats of men (Heb. 11:33) or may choose not to. Either way, faith will obey God rather than man. So, Stephen was not delivered from the stones hurled his way, God having something else in store for him. We read in Acts 7:59-60: "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." Here is trusting what the Lord Jesus Christ has said and what He does. It is following Him, who paved the way straight through death and the grave. It is believing that God never forsakes the work of His hands for Christ's sake.

The Victory

For a night, it looked like the enemy had won the victory. Daniel was thrown into a pit of hungry lions. Daniel, however, already knew what it was to live among lions. Though he may not have known the text, he knew the experience of "your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). What threatens the church is not always persecution and oppression. In times of rest and ease, the dangers are no less great. We must pray: "Thy Kingdom come!" In other words: "Defend and preserve Thy church! Let not Thy Church fall in the claws of the roaring lion, Satan."

The apostle John wrote: "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). The victory for Daniel was not when the door was opened and the king cried: "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" (Dan 6:20). The victory was already there when the world watched on while Daniel opened his window, and despite everything prayed to His God. They could see something that, if they would stop and think about it, should have made them turn in amazement. Here is someone who would rather pray than live.

It is a miracle when a sinner truly prays to God. Then your life is in God. And indeed, "to live apart from Him is death: 'tis good His face to seek," even if the lions are waiting.

Watching world, look on! Look carefully. See in the praying and supplication of the people of God a miracle. It's the miracle of a gracious God, who so overpowers sinners that they would rather die than miss their God. This is the triumph of the grace of God. This is a triumph merited by nothing less than the blood of Christ.

What does the watching world find us doing?
Let us pray. 

Dr. L.W. Bilkes is pastor emeritus of the Grand Rapids congregation.

02

MEDITATION:

Daniel Found Praying

06

EDITORIAL:

The Calling to Gospel Ministry

08

BOOK REVIEW:

What Does It Mean
To Fear the Lord

10

OUR FORMS:

The Reformed Form
for Baptism - 2

14

INTERVIEW SERIES:

An Interview With
Student Floris Visser

20

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Family Anniversaries



THE CALLING TO GOSPEL MINISTRY

The call to gospel ministry is one of the most solemn and weighty responsibilities a man can undertake. It is not a mere career choice, nor is it a personal ambition; rather, it is a divine calling that originates from God Himself. Our churches, drawing deeply from Scripture, have long emphasized that Gospel ministry is a sacred trust given by God to those whom He has set apart for the proclamation of His Word. It is a calling that requires a profound sense of divine appointment, a heart burdened for the lost, a commitment to sound doctrine and practice, and a willingness to endure hardships for the sake of Christ.

The Biblical Foundation of the Call to Gospel Ministry

Throughout Scripture, God is the One who calls His servants into ministry. The Old Testament is replete with examples of divine callings. Moses was called from a burning bush (Ex. 3:1-12), Isaiah from a vision of the Lord's glory (Isa. 6:1-8), and Jeremiah from his mother's womb (Jer. 1:4-10). In each case, the calling was initiated by God through His Word, not man. In the New Testament, Christ personally called His disciples to follow Him and proclaim the kingdom of God (Matt. 4:18-22). Paul, in his epistles, makes it clear that gospel ministry is a divine calling, not a human endeavor. He writes, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1). The apostle Paul also emphasizes that Christ is the One who appoints ministers: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12). This passage shows that Gospel ministers are given by Christ for the edification of the church through repentance and faith. It is not a man-made office, but one ordained by God Himself.

Personal and Ecclesiastical Confirmation of the Call

Our churches, standing in the Reformed tradition, have always maintained that a call to Gospel ministry has two essential aspects: an internal call and an external call. The internal call is the personal conviction and burden from the Lord, while the external call is the confirmation of the church.

The Internal Call: The internal call to ministry—distinct from the indispensable personal conversion—is a deep and abiding conviction that God has placed upon a man's heart. It is a desire to preach the gospel, shepherd God's people, and see Christ exalted in the church. This call is not driven by

selfish ambition or a desire for prominence, but by a holy compulsion to serve. As Paul says, “Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16). John Calvin, in his Institutes of the Christian Religion, speaks of the necessity of this internal call. He writes, “No one ought to intrude into the ministry without being called; for what is more absurd than for anyone to assume to himself what no one is permitted to take?” (Book 4, Chapter 3). A true calling is not a casual inclination but a divinely implanted desire to serve Christ and His church. He sees impossibility from his side, which only the Lord makes possible in His way and at His time. When there is no clarity: “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord” (Ps. 27:14), and experience, “The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me” (Ps. 138:8). Charles Haddon Spurgeon once wrote concerning this call to his students, “In order to a be true call to the ministry there must be an irresistible, overwhelming craving and raging thirst for telling others what God has done to our own souls ... If any student in this room could be content to be a newspaper editor, or a grocer, or a farmer or a doctor, or a lawyer, or a senator, or a king, in the name of heaven and earth let him go his way; he is not the man in whom dwells the Spirit of God in its fulness, for a man so filled with God would utterly weary of any pursuit but that for which his inmost soul pants. If on the other hand, you can say that for all the wealth of both the Indies you could not and dare not espouse any other calling so as to be put aside from preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, then, depend upon it, if other things be equally satisfactory, you have the signs of this apostleship.”

The External Call: The internal call must be confirmed by the church through an external call. This means that those who sense a call to ministry must be examined and affirmed by the body of Christ. The Apostle Paul instructs Timothy: “Lay hands suddenly on no man” (1 Tim. 5:22a), indicating that careful discernment is required before recognizing someone as a minister. The external call involves the affirmation of a person’s gifts, character, and doctrinal soundness by the local church, its elders, and other pastors. The church has the responsibility to equip through seminary studies, test and confirm a candidate’s calling, ensuring that such men meet the biblical qualifications for ministry. This principle is evident in Acts 13:2-3, where the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul, and the church laid hands on them and sent them out.

The Qualifications and Character of the Minister

Following Scripture, our churches place a strong emphasis on the qualifications of those who would enter Gospel ministry. The primary qualifications are laid out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. These passages stress that a minister must be above reproach, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, and not given to drunkenness, violence, or the love of money. At the heart of these qualifications is character. A minister must be a man of godliness and integrity, whose life reflects the holiness of Christ and finding everything in Christ. Paul reminds Timothy: “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:16). The minister’s life must be an example to the flock, demonstrating humility, faithfulness, and a deep love for Christ. Doctrine and practice are also central. A Gospel minister must be committed to sound doctrine, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). He must be “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” (Titus 1:9). Faithful biblical and experiential preaching and teaching are essential aspects of the calling.

The Challenges and Rewards of Gospel Ministry

The call to gospel ministry is not an easy one. It is a path marked by sacrifice, suffering, adversity, and opposition. Jesus warned His disciples, “If the world hate you, ye know that it

THE EXTERNAL CALL:
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hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). Ministers of the Gospel will face trials, discouragements, and spiritual warfare. They will bear the burden of shepherding souls, dealing with conflict, and confronting sin. Paul, describing his own ministry, writes of being “troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair” (2 Cor. 4:8). Yet, despite these hardships, Gospel ministry is a glorious calling. It is an underserved privilege to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, to see sinners brought from death to life, and to witness the church built up in the faith. Paul declares, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). The greatest reward of Gospel ministry is hearing Christ say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21). Those who labour for the Gospel do so in the dependence and hope that their efforts will bear eternal fruit. As Daniel 12:3 says, “And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the

firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.”

“The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few” (Matt. 9:37). This is visible in your federation with a number of vacant congregations. The work of the Gospel is urgent, and the need for faithful ministers is great. May those whom the Lord is calling respond with the words of Isaiah: “Here am I! Send me” (Isa. 6:8). And may all who labour in the Word find strength in the promise that their labour in the Lord is never in vain. May the Lord in His mercy stir up much prayer among His people longing to see a raising up and equipping of a next generation of preachers and pastors from among us to serve His church. ①

Dr. Adriaan C. Neele is president of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, professor of historical theology and homiletics, and ordained minister in the Heritage Reformed Congregations of North America.

The work of the Gospel is urgent, and the need for faithful ministers is great. May those whom the Lord is calling respond with the words of Isaiah: “Here am I! Send me” (Isa. 6:8).

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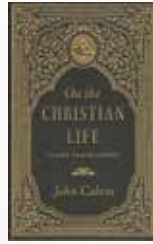
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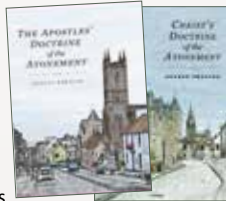
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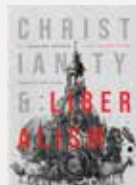


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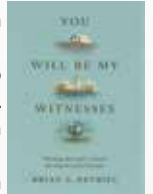
By J. Gresham Machen
J. Gresham Machen was a professor at Princeton Seminary. He founded Westminster Seminary in 1929 and led the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936. His books include Christianity & Liberalism, The Christian View of Man and The Person of Christ. Christianity and Liberalism is judged to be among the "100 Most Influential Books of the 20th Century." Machen's earnest case for true, biblical faith and communion in Jesus Christ has been read around the world for 100 years. Originally published in 1923, this new edition features a brand-new Foreword by Kevin DeYoung and is issued with the hope and prayer that the next century will be celebrated as one of reformation and renewal for Christ's church throughout the world. This edition will encourage the younger generation of confessional Reformed Protestants to hold fast to historic, Bible-believing, theologically orthodox Christianity, and to recognize and resist the appropriation of theological liberalism in evangelical circles."—Ligon Duncan, Chancellor and CEO, Reformed Theological Seminary. Hardcover 192 pages, Westminster Seminary Press. **RBS Price \$21.00**



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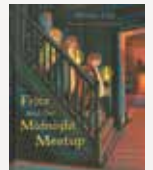
You Will Be My Witnesses: Theology for God's Church Serving in God's Mission

By Brian DeVries
Mission is God's work. God spoke the first promise of gospel hope, sent His Son into this fallen world, and commissioned His Spirit to empower His church for witness. Until the day Christ returns, God has called His people to participate in His mission through evangelism, apologetics, church planting, cultural engagement, gospel suffering, and many other activities that faithfully communicate gospel hope in Christ. This practical introduction provides a biblical framework for understanding the church's role in God's mission. It reviews the biblical story of God's mission, draws insights from the church's witness since Pentecost, and studies aspects of contemporary Christian witness. Each chapter ends with study questions to encourage further reflection and discussion by church members and ministry leaders. Readers will gain refreshing insights into how they can participate in faithfully bearing witness to Christ through the church's work in the world today. It is written for church members, college and seminary students, ministry workers, and church leaders. "This book is a tremendous resource: careful, clear, confessional, biblical, hopeful, inspiring, and practical. This will be one of the first books—if not the first book on missions that I recommend to pastors, students, and church members." Kevin DeYoung. Softcover, 292 pages, Crossway **RBS Price \$23.00**



Fritz And The Midnight Meetup: A True Story About Kids Who Prayed

By Megan Hill
One by one, the children tiptoe down the stairs.... It's midnight at the orphanage, and a group of children are sneaking into the kitchen to pray together. Would anyone else come too? they wonder. Night after night, more children join the fireside prayer meeting. But a bully named Fritz threatens to disrupt the group. When he sneaks down to scare the other children, will Fritz be the surprised one? In this heartwarming story, readers will share the excitement as the boys and girls creep down the dark stairs, and they will feel the tension of the bully's threats. But most of all they will discover the difference children can make when they pray together. Based on a true story from a German orphanage. Hardcover, 32 pages, B&H Publishing Group **RBS Price \$19.00**



God in His Beautiful Greatness: A Devotional Theology of the Doctrine of God

By Baruch Maoz
Baruch's systematic treatment of God in His glorious greatness and goodness is delightful. This treatment is far more than a theological treatise, although it is that. Baruch wants his readers to meditate upon the law—the Torah, or the "instruction" and "revelation" of the LORD (Psalm 1:1). —From the foreword by Dr. Joel Beeke. Baruch was born (December 1943) in the United States, immigrated to Israel in 1953, and was converted to Christ during his mandatory military duty in 1963. He studied Bible and theology in Glasgow, Scotland, and later at the Israel College of the Bible. He is married to Bracha. He served as field director for Christian Witness to Israel (1974-2006) and as founding pastor of Grace and Truth Christian Congregation (1975-2008), a mixed congregation of veteran and immigrant Israelis, Jews, and Arabs, where he exercised an expository pulpit ministry. Baruch's literature ministry began in 1968. He has translated and written scores of Christian books in Hebrew, largely theological and exegetical, while initiating and editing the Modern Hebrew Translation of the Old Testament and translating the New Testament for that project. His published works, all but one being translations from Hebrew, include five in English, one in Dutch, and one in Polish. He and his wife reside in Everett, WA, close to their three married daughters, their daughter's spouses, and their nine grandchildren. **Spurs Discussion:**



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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FEAR THE LORD?

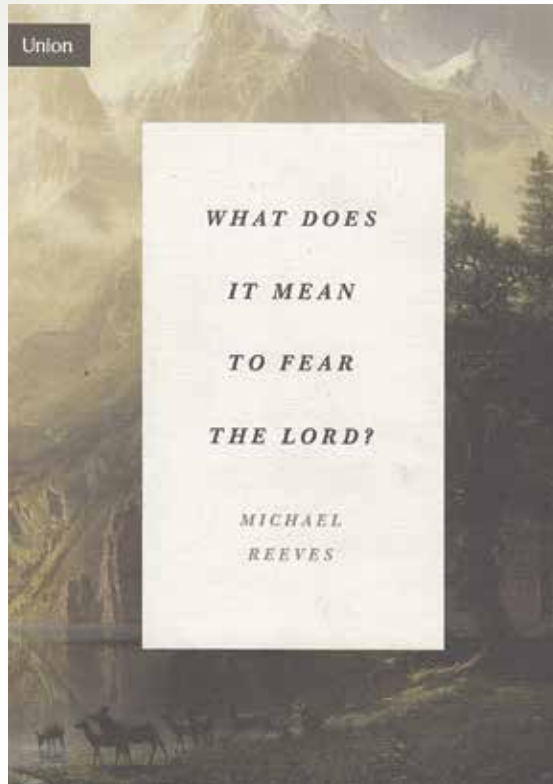
What Does It Mean to Fear the Lord? by Michael Reeves. Published by Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, 2021. Softcover, 72 pages.

"He [or she] is someone who fears the Lord." This is a way we often use to describe a person in whom we see the marks of a Christian. It is a biblical term. "The LORD taketh pleasure in those that fear Him" (Ps. 147:11). This is one example of how the Bible often uses this term. Yet, the Bible also uses the word "fear" in the sense of dread in relationship to those who don't have this godly fear. Many are confused about this term. This little book can help us understand the word "fear," often used in Scripture, in the fullest sense of the word. It can also help us face "our culture of fear," where anxiety and fear are curbed by medication, counselling and drugs. "It means that in a culture awash with anxiety, fear is increasingly seen as wholly negative. And Christians have been swept along, adopting society's negative assessment of all fear" (p. 18).

Is fear a good thing or is it bad? "Many times, Scripture clearly views fear as a bad thing from which Christ has to come to rescue us" (pp. 13-14). But it also says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John 4:18). Yet, again and again, we are called to fear, even to fear God. On the one hand, we are told that Jesus frees us from fear but that we also ought to fear Him. The author makes clear that his aim is to clear up some of "our crippling fears, giving us instead a most delightful fear."

To understand the relationship between fear and delight, we must know something about the various ways "fear" is used in the Bible, and this is thoroughly explained by the author quoting numerous Scripture references. First of all, we have to realize there are different kinds of fear. This is clearly demonstrated when the people of Israel were gathered at Mount Sinai and were awed by the audible and visible signs of God's presence and were afraid and trembled. They asked Moses to speak for them and he said: "Fear not, for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not (Ex. 20:18-20). Here the word fear is used for both being afraid of God and fearing God.

The word "fear" is also used throughout Scripture as containing an element of love. In fact, fear and love often go together, as in Psalm 145. Here the psalmist says that "He [God] fulfills the desire of those who fear him, and preserves all who love him" (p. 29). Such references, where God's pure goodness and absolute grace are combined caused Bunyan to say: "We love God... in his holiness and tremble at the marvelousness of his mercy. True fear of God is true love for God defined" (p. 28). He concludes that this right fear flows primarily "from a sense of the love and kindness of God to the soul... Indeed nothing can lay a stronger obligation upon the heart to fear God, than sense of, or hope in mercy



(Jer. 33:89)" (p. 27-28).

For Christians, the "fear of God really does not mean being afraid of God" (p. 15). This is explained clearly in Isaiah 11:1-3, which looks forward to "the Rod out of the stem of Jesse." Here is a wonderful promise of the coming Saviour giving "the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD." Fear and delight are present and expressed in the coming Messiah and for all who trust in Him.

Is fear the best word that can be used to describe the fear of the Lord? "Would another word capture it better?" By reviewing various Scripture passages, Reeves helps us understand the full meaning of this word. It describes a sinner's response to God and who He is and demonstrates "that the fear of God is no mild-mannered, reserved, or limp thing. It is a startlingly physical, overpowering reaction" (p. 32). Respect and reverence are too weak. Awe may be better, but it does not capture the physical intensity or

the exquisite delight believers may have in God. "Perhaps it is best to recognize the shortcomings of all words" (p. 32).

The right fear of God includes affection, emotion, fear, and joy. Therefore, "the right fear of God is not the gloomy flip side to joy in God. Rather, it is a way of speaking about the sheer intensity of the saints' happiness in God... Our joy in God is at its purest, a trembling and wonderfilled—yes, fearful—joy. For the object of our joy is so fearfully wonderful. We are made to rejoice and tremble before God, to love and enjoy him with an intensity that is fitting for him" (p. 33).


The final chapters expand in greater detail that the true fear of the Lord has aspects of fear, such as being overwhelmed by the Creator and overwhelmed by the Father. Here, Reeves concludes with a personal confrontation. The fear of the Lord is not only the beginning of the knowledge of God, "It is also the beginning of true knowledge of ourselves. In the light of God's holiness and majesty, I understand how puny, vicious, and pathetic I am. Without that fear, my self-perception will be wildly distorted by pride. It is when we are most thrilled with God that our masks slip and we see ourselves for what we really are: creatures, sinners, forgiven, adopted" (p. 55). We can be filled at the same time with loathing and with hope and comfort. Therefore, there is a "battle of fears in the Christian life" (p. 59), to become more and more Christ-like.

The final chapter, entitled, "Eternal Ecstasy" focuses on the second coming of Christ, which confronts us with the two fears: hell, and heaven. "All fears are a foretaste" of these two fears, although only partial (p. 67).

In the closing paragraph, the author mentions the sermon, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection" by Thomas Chalmers of Glasgow, Scotland, which Reeves thinks may be the most famous sermon ever delivered on this subject. Chalmers shows that the love of sin can be expelled best by the love of God. "It is the affection that expels our sinful fears and our anxieties. To grow in this sweet and quaking wonder at God is to taste heaven now" (p. 68).

Incidentally, the author believes that the all-encompassing "fear of the Lord is the reason Christianity is the most song-filled of all religions. It is the reason why, from how Christians worship together to how they stream

music... Christians instinctively want to sing to express the affection behind their words of praise, and to stir it up, knowing that words spoken flatly will not do in worship of this God" (pp. 48-49).

This little book, filled with the knowledge of the "fear of God," easily fits into a pocket or purse. It is endorsed by Joel Beeke, Sinclair Ferguson, Derek Thomas, Michael Haykin, and Sam Alberry. An expanded version is also available. 

This book is available in Canada at Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario, and at Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.

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THE REFORMED FORM FOR BAPTISM –2

Last month, we began a series of articles on the Reformed Form of Baptism used in our Free Reformed churches and other Dutch Reformed denominations. We covered the first part of the Form of Baptism, which deals with man's sin and misery and the absolute need to be born again.

We now move on to the second part of our Form, which speaks of the salvation God has provided in Christ for lost sinners. Against the dark background of our total depravity, we are shown the light of God's marvellous grace. Baptism, we are told, "witnesses and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ." What does this statement mean? Some people believe that baptism tells them that their sins are actually forgiven when that sacrament is administered to them. They think that, as the water removes dirt from our bodies, the blood of Christ cleanses us from all our sins. Others see it as a strong reminder that they need the blood of Christ to wash away their sins.

But the Form of Baptism also mentions the word seal. How should this word be interpreted? What does baptism seal and who are its subjects? This is a question that has been debated ever since the Reformation. The early Reformers believed that baptism does not seal the baptized person himself or herself but seals the promises of the covenant of grace made to all who are baptized. This view is supported by the Heidelberg Catechism, which states in Q.&A.74 that redemption from sin by the blood of Christ is *promised* to infants no less than to adults

Later, another view emerged in Reformed churches. For many, baptism became a seal upon inward grace. To be sealed by baptism implied possession of the new life in Christ and belonging to the elect seed of the covenant of grace. They were viewed either as regenerated prior to or during baptism.

The difference between the early and later generations of Reformed church members was that the former saw the seal as something objective, namely as God's promise that is sealed to all who are baptized, whether they are elect or not. The latter viewed the seal as something subjective, as the inner, saving work of the Holy Spirit in man's soul.

This has been an unfortunate development in Reformed theology, for it has led to two errors. The first error is that many have simply concluded that all children of believers receive baptism as a seal on their (presumed) regeneration and must therefore be treated as believers. The other error goes in the

opposite direction. They agree that baptism seals inward grace on God's elect. They think the number of the elect is so small that only those who possess the required marks of election may rejoice in their baptism. The result is that those who cannot show these marks have little or no comfort from this sacrament.

Yet, rightly understood, baptism is a sacrament of tremendous importance to salvation. The divine declaration that salvation comes by faith in God's promises is addressed to all who receive baptism, as well as the other sacrament, the Lord's Supper. Both put God's seal on this glorious truth. What the Word already states clearly, the sacraments confirm. Notice what the Heidelberg Catechism says in Answer 66: "The sacraments are holy visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end [purpose], that by the use thereof, He may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel, namely, that He grants us freely the remission of sin, and life eternal for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ, accomplished on the cross"

What the Father and the Son promise to every baptized child objectively, the Spirit desires to work in them subjectively. This is essential, for without this no one can be saved.

So far, we have learned that, according to our Form of Baptism, with support of the Catechism, it is not we who are sealed in baptism, but the promises of the gospel are sealed to us. We call this objective sealing.

The Baptismal Form next elaborates on how baptism seals the promises of God to us. Our covenant God is a Triune God. Each of the three Persons of the Trinity is involved in this sealing, so that when we are baptized, we are assured by each Person that

God is an all-sufficient God to us and our children.

God the Father witnesses and seals to us that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with us. God the Son seals to us that He washes us in His blood from all our sins, and God the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that He will dwell in us and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying to us that which we have in Christ, namely His promises. What the Father and the Son promise to every baptized child objectively, the Spirit desires to work in them subjectively. This is essential, for without this no one can be saved.

The Spirit alone can make us partakers of what baptism signifies and seals. This indispensable work of the Spirit is promised to us. He wants to apply what Christ has performed for us. As Gerald R. Procee writes in his book, *Holy Baptism*, *

Here we must distinguish between the granting of the promise of Christ's benefits and the actual appropriation, or reception of these benefits... There is a difference between the act of giving and that of

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appropriating saving grace... The act of giving is an objective giving. Just as a will and testament objectively places a person in possession of an inheritance though it must still be subjectively received, so God's promised salvation must be received by faith.

But are these promises given to everyone who is baptized? Does our Triune God seal the covenant promises to all covenant children? Some in the Reformed community say no. The promises, they insist, are sealed only to the elect. This view can take two forms. Either one takes the position that every covenant child is likely to be elect and therefore baptism seals inward grace that may be presumed to be there. Or else, one waits until evidence of election will show up later in life, at which time baptism will take on a rich meaning, but not until then. Both these views make the sacrament of baptism conditional on man. Some will say it is a valid baptism only if the subject of baptism possesses grace real or imagined.

This means we may go to the God of our baptism and plead His gracious promises, whether we know we are elect or not, whether we have assurance of salvation or not.

Our Baptismal Form knows nothing of such a conditional baptism. It says to all who receive this sacrament, I baptize you in the name of the Triune God. Baptism in the name of the Triune God has a valid meaning for every one who is baptized. This means we may go to the God of our baptism and plead His gracious promises, whether we know we are elect or not, whether we have assurance of salvation or not. As poor, needy sinners, we may go to a rich Christ who has everything we need. His invitation is to all sinners: "Open wide thy mouth of longing; I will satisfy thy need" (Psalter 222:5). ¹¹

**Holy Baptism by Gerald R. Procee, pp. 258-59. Published by Free Reformed Publications.*

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This event will not be live streamed or recorded at Laura's request.



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The topic of his presentation will be:

A Word from God

Into The Heart of a Sinner



For more information on this and many other works of the society please visit www.tbsbibles.org

AN INTERVIEW WITH STUDENT FLORIS VISSER

In a previous issue of the Messenger, Rev. J. Schoeman, the chairman of our denominational Theological Education Committee, interviewed one of our students, Carsten Koopman, with a view to introducing him to our churches. In this issue, he introduces us to our second student, Mr. Floris Visser, arrived from the Netherlands with his family in September of last year - Editors.

1. Hello, Floris. Thank you for taking the time to introduce yourself to the churches by way of this interview. Let me begin by asking you to tell us a bit about yourself: How old you are, where you grew up, where you went to school, what you did for a living, etc.

My name is Floris Visser, 39 yrs old, married to Petra. We are blessed with six children. I was raised in Apeldoorn where I attended the Jacobus Fruytier School. When I turned 18, I moved to Gouda and studied at Driestar Educatief (master in education). After getting married in 2008, I moved to Zeeland, where we settled in the small village Nieuwerkerk. I've been working as a schoolteacher for 10 years, 5 years full-time and five years part-time. During those last five years, I studied theology in Amsterdam (VU and PThU, 2013). After my job as a schoolteacher, I transitioned to a part-time role as a software developer in the web industry.

2. What was it like moving from the Netherlands to the United States?

It was a big step; when we decided to move, we looked around and realized we had to make decisions about all our belongings. Should we take them with us, or leave them behind? Possessions became somewhat relative—and family all the more valuable.

The immigration process was a huge undertaking, but it went surprisingly smoothly. We were very grateful that the congregation of Grand Rapids had prepared their parsonage for us! What a difference that made!



3. Tell us about your wife and children.

My wife, Petra (39), was born and raised in Nieuwerkerk. We met at Driestar Educatief, where we both studied to be a schoolteacher. She has worked as a teacher at an Elementary School for more than 18 years.

Our six children are: Marco (13), Bart (12), Hanne (9), Marlize (6), Tiemen (4), and Elias (18 months). They are adapting very well and are doing good at school.

4. You have only been in the United States for a short time, but how are you settling in?

The U.S. and the Netherlands are very different—traffic rules, housing, church life, politics, social life, currency, and the imperial system. We adapted to most things fairly quickly (like traffic), but some aspects have been more challenging, especially cultural differences—how people interact and their manners.

Immigration can sometimes be exhausting. For example, when we did our groceries for the first time, we had certain recipes in mind and looked for the ingredients we needed. But then we realized we could only find four out of five... Those surprises take a lot of time and energy. However, with some creativity and the help of others, we’ve managed quite well.

5. You were raised in the Gereformeerde Gemeenten (Netherlands Reformed Congregations) in the Netherlands. Later you became a member of a congregation of the Hervormde Kerk (Reformed Church) which was affiliated with the Gereformeerde Bond (Reformed Alliance) and is now part of the PKN (Protestantse Kerk in Nederland – the Protestant Church in the Netherlands). Tell us how that came about. What do you appreciate about both of these denominations (Ger Gem and PKN)?

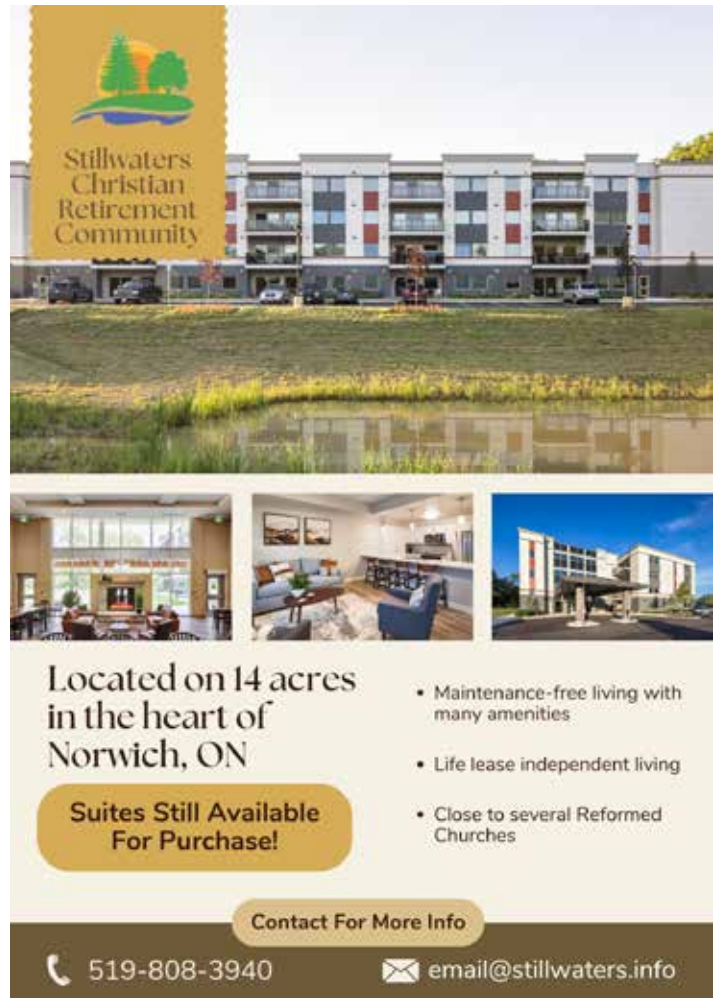
The time in the NRC was a blessed time. The Lord worked clearly through the preaching in Apeldoorn. Shortly after we married, we became members in the Hervormde Kerk (Sirjansland), where we experienced a clear exposition of the gospel. We appreciated the devotion of the people in the NRC, but also the strong spiritual bond in our local PKN church.

6. Your former pastor, Rev. J. Pronk (no relation to Rev. C. Pronk), is pastor of the Providence Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI which is only a short distance from where you are living (the parsonage of the Grand Rapids Free Reformed Church). That is a remarkable providence (!). Can you comment on this?

This is indeed remarkable. He was our pastor for eight years, during which I also felt called to the ministry and began my studies. He was also the one who gave me the opportunity to preach in America for the first time in the summer of 2023.

7. How did you come into contact with the Free Reformed Churches?

After I preached at RCA Providence in Grand Rapids, the elders of FRC Grand Rapids learned that I was in town and still had availability in my schedule to preach in both Wyoming and Grand Rapids. And that’s how it all began.



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8. How well do you know our churches? Describe the contact you have had with some of our congregations.

I preached in three congregations in the U.S., as well as in Vineland and Fenwick in Ontario. I deeply appreciated the warm welcome and loving care from the families who hosted me, the consistories, and the people I spoke with after the services. It is a privilege to get to know the churches better and to be invited to preach in congregations where I have never been before. The gospel of Christ binds us, needy sinners, together.

9. You completed your seminary education in the Netherlands. You also received several calls from churches in the Netherlands which you declined. Instead, you decided to come to North America. Why?

This goes back to 2018. During one of my internships, I heard about PRTS. After some investigation, I got to know a couple of students there, and a spiritual bond developed. They told me about the preaching and teaching in Grand Rapids. From that moment, it stayed with me. Especially during the two calls I had from Dutch churches, by God’s providence the way to those churches remained closed, and I was convinced to come to North America and serve the church there.

10. In June of this year, the consistory of the Grand Rapids FRC asked our synod to examine you with a view to making you eligible for call by the Grand Rapids congregation. As a result of this examination, Synod decided the following (quoting from the Acts of Synod, 2024, p. 33):

“To offer [you] the status of student for the ministry in the FRCNA

That the TEC consider enrolling [you] in a program at PRTS where [you] can be under the instruction of our two professors and the supervision of the TEC as well as provide [you] with an opportunity to get to know our churches better

That in the meantime, considering that [you have] completed [your] studies and have been examined by the IRC (Interchurch Relations Committee), that we grant [you] a license to speak an edifying word in the churches

That at the end of one year, the TEC may recommend that [you] be examined by Synod as a candidate for the ministry.”

The upshot is that you will have to complete one more year of seminary training. How do you feel about this?

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“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord.” Ps. 127:3

In June 2024, I was interviewed by the Synod of the FRC. It was no surprise that the denomination would get to know me better, and I felt at peace with another year of preparation. For me personally, it was an invitation as well as a confirmation to come to North America and serve the church (t)here. A long-held desire became reality.

I am also very happy with the supervision of the TEC. Their wise counsel and instruction has been of great help to me.

11. What courses are you currently taking at PRTS? Share with us some of your impressions about the seminary and your courses.

In the fall and winter semester, I finished a course on Experiential preaching (Dr. Bilkes), Preaching Heidelberg Catechism (Dr. Kranendonk), and a course on secession history (Rev. VanderMeyden). Currently, I am enrolled in a few systematic courses, Christology and Covenant Theology. It is a blessing to be taught by professors who are also my pastors. The bond is not only academic but also spiritual. I greatly appreciate the personal attention the professors give to their students.

12. Why do you desire to serve the Lord as a minister of the gospel in the FRCNA?

To be honest, until last year, it was never my intention to become a minister in the FRCNA, but the church came into my life by God's providence. The more I get to know the denomination, the more I appreciate it.

13. You have been speaking an edifying word in the congregations over the past several months. What are some burdens the Lord has laid on your heart when it comes to preaching?

Every sermon is about God and how we relate to Him. Through Christ, we may have peace with God. It is my desire to preach Christ as the only way to be reconciled to God. It is a joy to be amazed by the glory of God in Christ, together with the congregation.

14. How can we as churches pray for you and your wife?

Please pray for God's sustaining grace in the midst of all the responsibilities. Pray for our children, that they may adapt more and more to the new situation. Pray for my wife, Petra, as she stays home to care for us, and pray for me, that I may receive help in the seminary work and the fulfillment of the Holy Spirit to be equipped for ministry. ①

Rev. J. Schoeman is the pastor of the Emmanuel Free Reformed Church in Abbotsford, BC and chairman of our denominational Theological Education Committee.



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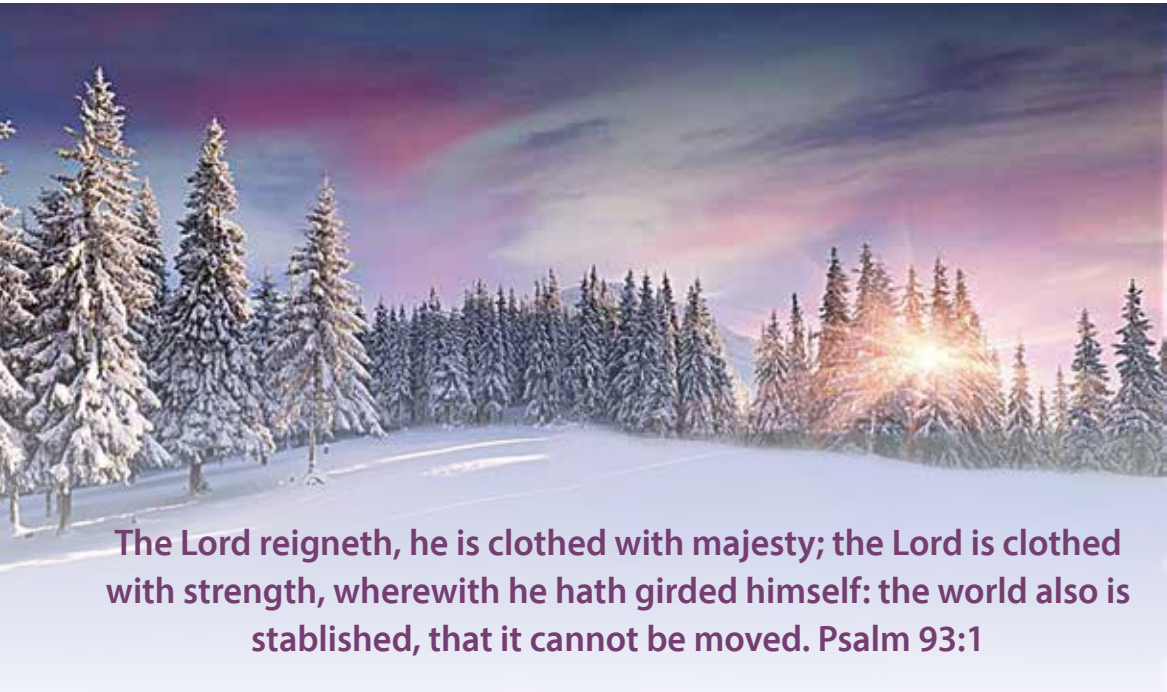
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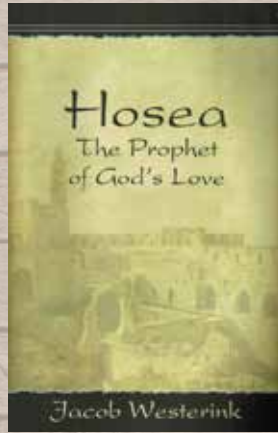


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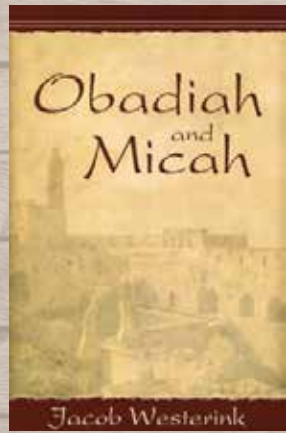
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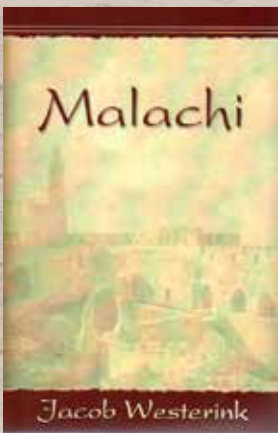
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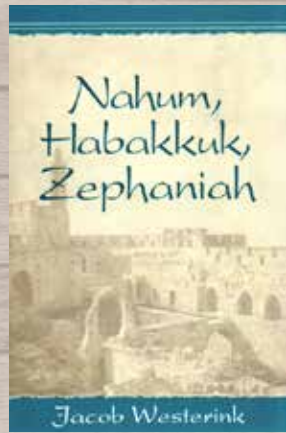
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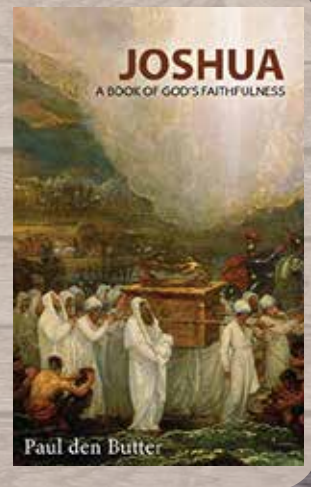


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ANNOUNCEMENTS

ANNIVERSARY

1975 January 22 2025

Psalm 89:1 *I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever:
With my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness
to all generations.*

With thankfulness to God and His faithfulness,
we announce the **50th wedding anniversary** of



Jacob & Nellie Bos

(nee van der Perk)

With love from your children,

Tanja & Folkert Speksnijder

Liesbeth & Arie Duizer

(Jesse, Ryan, Sarah, Alissa)

Gert & Christine Bos

(Aaron, Abigail, Naomi, Ava, Josiah)

Adrie & Louisa Bos

(Leah, Owen, Austin, Tessa)

Jaap & Martha Bos

(Tyler, Jason, Nathan, Amanda, Braidon, Alayna)

Cora & Henri Hendriks van Warby

(Derrick, Jake, Arden, Adrian, Nathelie, Marcus, Tamarah)

Nelleke & Bert Roos

(Emma, Olivia, Ian, Alex, Kayla, Ivan, Sadie, Marie)

Sarianne & Wouter Koster

(Summer, Rose, Levi, Finn, Faith)

Jan & Elisabeth Bos

(Elliot, Esmé, Viola)

ANNIVERSARY

It is with thankfulness and praise to the Lord that we hope to celebrate the
65TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY of our parents, DV

JOHN & JANE WUBS

(nee Gijze)



1960 March 12 2025

Wedding text: Romans 12:11c "Serving the Lord"

God has richly blessed us with parents who serve Him,
and who also taught us to serve Him with our lives.
We pray God will continue to bless and guide them.

With our love,

Diana & Bernie Meinen – Monarch, AB

Gerald & Elma Wubs (Van Oosten) – Rosedale, BC

Melvin & Jacqueline Wubs (Van Oosten) – Chilliwack, BC

Leonard & Bernice Wubs (Vandenbos) – Surrey, BC + Jacqueline Wubs (Noort)

John & Jacquelin Wubs (VanVeen) – Orton, AB

Jennifer & John Jongerden – Rosedale, BC

Sharon & Marc Jongerden – Nobleford, AB

Sonya & Klaas Brobbel – Fort Macleod, AB

34 Grandchildren & 58 Great-Grandchildren

Mailing Address:

PO Box 2353 Fort Macleod, AB T0L 0Z0 Phone: 1-403-715-2794