

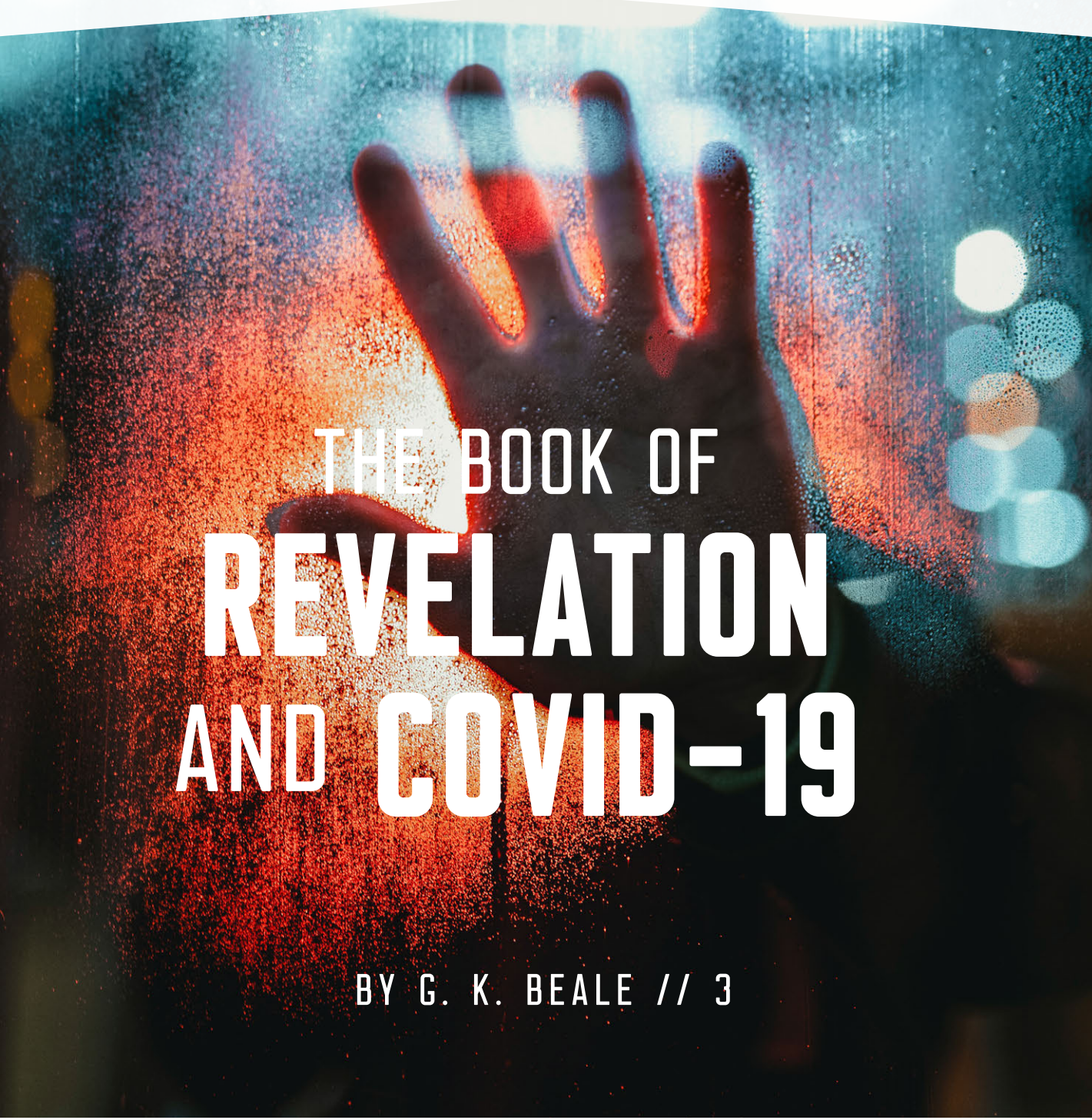
NEW HORIZONS

in the ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

8 Not Afraid of Bad News //
by *A. Craig Troxel*

SEPTEMBER 2020

12 Stories to Capture a
Child's Heart //
by *Rachel E. Crum*



THE BOOK OF
REVELATION
AND **COVID-19**

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On June 26, Casey Bessette was installed as pastor of Pilgrim OPC in Raleigh, North Carolina. OP pastor Ken Montgomery led the service, OP pastor Patrick Morgan preached the sermon, Dr. Alan Strange gave the charge to Bessette, and retiring pastor Douglas Withington gave the charge to the congregation. Bessette was previously teacher of the Word at Christ Presbyterian in Janesville, Wisconsin. Withington and his wife, Sharon, were honored with a cake reception to celebrate their twenty-four years of service to Pilgrim. Pictured: Withington, Strange, Bessette, Morgan, and Montgomery.



THE BOOK OF REVELATION AND COVID-19



G. K. BEALE // Some Christians have wondered whether or not COVID-19 is one of the signs that the end of world history and Christ's final coming is about to occur. With worldwide impact, economic upheaval, church services disrupted, and sickness and death rampant, it could appear that God is unleashing his final

judgments on an idolatrous world. But how are we as Christians to view this current pandemic in comparison to previous pandemics?

Revelation 6 and Ezekiel 14 are key passages that help us establish a context for judgments during the "church age" and the unfaithfulness of nations that provokes such a response from God. The purpose of this article is to establish an interpretive lens through these passages and to assert that what has been happening around us is a phenomenon that has occurred throughout world history, but which at the proper time can easily be escalated by God to be events that lead up to the very end of history.

Devastation and the Seals of Revelation

Worldwide impact with devastating consequences is indeed a precursor to the end of the age, and we have witnessed over the past few months a plague that has spread throughout the entire world. COVID-19 has reached

virtually every country on earth. The worldwide map of the "COVID-19 Coronavirus Tracker" (Henry Kaiser Foundation, kff.org, accessed August 5) shows the global spread, with especially heavy saturation in the United States, Brazil, India, and Russia. The number of total cases throughout the world is 18,540,110, with a total of 700,645 deaths. However, even more deadly was the Spanish flu of 1918, when fifty million died worldwide and 675,000 died in the United States. In the fourteenth century, the Black Death (the bubonic plague) killed roughly fifty to one hundred million people in Eurasia and North Africa. Even before that crisis, earlier in the fourteenth century, in northern Europe there was a severe famine, sometimes called "The Great Famine," due to heavy rains that ruined crops and to wars that ravaged some of the lands, that resulted in millions of deaths.

Understanding the fourth of the "seven seals" in the book of Revelation (Rev. 6:1–8) provides us with the

interpretive lens to evaluate the current "plague" and the other historical "plagues" noted above. To give the context, the first four seals will be listed here, but our focus in this article will be on the fourth seal and its significance.

Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come." I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come." And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard something like

a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine."

When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth. (Rev. 6:1–8 NASB 1995)

Understanding the Rule of Christ

But, before understanding the application of Revelation 6 today, and especially the fourth seal, we need to put it into its context in the entire book of Revelation.

Revelation establishes that Christ has received all authority from the Father and taken up his rule over the kingdoms of the earth (Rev. 1:5; 2:26–27; 3:21; 5:1–14). Presently, Christ is “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5), the one who has “conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev. 3:21 *ESV*). He is the Lamb who *takes a book* and then sits beside God who is on his throne to rule (Rev. 5:1–14). As a result of his death and resurrection, Christ receives authority in the first century to begin to rule over his kingdom (see Rev. 5:5). Indeed, he has made believers to be part of this kingdom, which has also occurred in the recent past: “You . . . purchased for God with your blood some from every . . . people . . . and you have made them to be a kingdom . . . and they are reigning upon the earth” (5:9–10, my translation). So, *the rule of Christ with his people (the church) has begun to take place directly after Christ’s resurrection and ascension.*

Opening the Book

What is the book that the Lamb received from God? Revelation 5:4 says “no one was found worthy to open the

book, or to look into it.” God promised Adam that he would reign over the earth. Although Adam forfeited this promise, Christ, the last Adam, was to inherit it. A man had to open the book, since the promise was made to humanity. Yet all are sinners and stand under the judgment contained in the book. Nevertheless, Christ is found worthy because he suffered the final judgment as an innocent sacrificial victim on behalf of his people, whom he represented and consequently redeemed (5:9) through not only his death but also resurrection.

In this light, the Lamb’s “conquering” through death and resurrection meant that he was able “to open the book” by removing “its seven seals” (Rev. 5:5). Roman wills often had to be witnessed by seven witnesses and sealed with seven seals by the seven witnesses. Thus, the book is like a will indicating a covenantal promise of an inheritance, which the Lamb receives, yet he is, at the same time, the executor, putting the plan of the inheritance into effect.

The seals that John sees in Revelation 5 originally come mainly from the book of Daniel. The prophet Daniel was to “seal up the book” until the “end of time” (Dan. 12:4, 9; see also Dan. 8:26–27). Daniel could not understand the meaning of the visions, since they were not yet fulfilled. But the unsealing of the book by Christ symbolically means that Daniel’s visions about judgment and God’s kingdom have begun fulfillment, though they are not yet consummated as they will be at the final coming of Christ. The unsealing also means that with fulfillment comes a much greater understanding of the Old Testament prophecies than was possessed by prophets like Daniel.

Revelation 5:9–10 interprets Christ’s worthiness to receive the book as indicating his authority to redeem his people and establish them as kings and priests. The hymn of Revelation 5:12 interprets the Lamb’s reception of the “book” mentioned in vv. 9–10 more generally as his reception of “power and riches and wisdom and might and

honor and glory and blessing,” thus showing that his receiving the book has given him sovereign, divine power.

Understanding the “Already But Not Yet” Judgments in Revelation

When Christ successively “breaks” the first four “seals,” he is showing that the prophetic contents of the book are beginning fulfillment, especially its judgments. The first four seals show how Christ’s authority extends even over situations of suffering sent from the hand of God (as we will see) to purify the saints and punish unbelievers. Examples of such suffering have been alluded to in the letters of Revelation 2–3. Some Christians may have wondered if Christ really was sovereign over disastrous circumstances, such as Nero’s mass persecution on so cruel a scale following the fire of Rome in AD 64. Revelation 6:1–8 is intended to show that Christ rules over such an apparently chaotic world and that suffering does not occur indiscriminately or by chance. We ourselves wonder whether or not God is in control of such events as COVID-19. This section of Revelation reveals, in fact, that destructive events are brought about by Christ for both redemptive and judicial purposes. It is Christ sitting on his throne who controls all the trials and persecutions of the church from the time of his first coming until his return on the last day. God is in control of such events as COVID-19.

The opening of the seals coincides with Christ’s taking up his position at the right hand of God, which occurred in the first century AD, so that the events depicted in the seals will begin to take place immediately and continue until the Lord’s return. The opening of the seals begins the actual revelation and execution of the contents of the scroll of Revelation 5. This makes sense of the exhortations in the seven letters to persevere in the face of suffering, for the suffering unleashed by the seals had already begun to take place even in the life of the seven churches to which John was writing. Christ opens each seal in

the heavenly throne room and issues the command for the contents of each to be executed on the earth.

The disasters that unfold are the same foreseen in the four judgments prophesied by Ezekiel in Ezekiel 14:12–21 (sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague) and the judgments prophesied by Jesus in Matt. 24:6–28 (war, famine, and persecution). In those cases, the calamities occur side by side, thus suggesting that the various disasters contained in the four seals also can occur at the same time rather than in any particular order. In addition, the glorified saints in Revelation 6:9–11 (who have died throughout the church age) appear to have suffered under all four trials portrayed in the seals, which points to their having taken place during the same general time period of the church age (see vv. 9–11). Therefore, following on from chapter 5, Revelation 6:1–8 describes the operation of the destructive forces which were unleashed *immediately upon the world as a result of Christ's victorious suffering at the cross, his resurrection, and his ascent to a position of rule at his Father's right hand.*

The Fourth Horseman

In particular, the deception of the first seal, the wars of the second seal, the famine of the third seal, and death and plague of the fourth seal have begun to be unleashed throughout the church age. The last rider to be released has the name “Death,” with “Hades . . . following with him” (6:8). Death and Hades are satanic forces under the ultimate governance of the throne room of God (note also Rev. 1:18, where Christ has control over “death and of Hades”). The fourth horseman probably is a summary of the previous three seal judgments but also himself unleashes the new trial of “plague.” He uses the preceding three woes to bring death. But it is clear that they do not always result in death (see, for instance, the third horseman who brings famine). Uppermost in mind are the antagonistic actions of Satan's forces. The Greek word is literally “death,” which prob-

ably underscores that “plague” brings “death,” since in the Greek Old Testament “death” (*thanatos*) translates the Hebrew word for “plague” thirty times, including twice in Ezekiel 14:19–21, which is quoted in the second half of Revelation 6:8. Indeed, Ezekiel 14:12–23 provides part of the model not only for the fourth seal but for all of Revelation 6:1–8. Ezekiel 14:21, “I will send my four evil judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague to cut off man” (my translation) is quoted in the second part of Revelation 6:8, as a part of the fourth seal: “Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.”

The disaster wrought by the fourth horseman is explicitly limited to a “fourth of the earth.” This means that the four woes do not harm every person without exception. Nevertheless, their destructive force is felt by people throughout the world. The four horsemen in Zechariah 1 and especially 6 form the model for the four horsemen portrayed in the first four seals of Revelation 6. The horsemen in Zechariah 6 have a worldwide effect, which is why the horsemen of Revelation 6 likewise should be understood to have a worldwide effect, though they do not affect every single person on the earth. The cosmic extent of the tribulations is emphasized by the fact that there are four horsemen, a figurative number for universality (as with the four living creatures in Rev. 4:6–8 and “the four winds of the earth” in 7:1–3). Therefore, just as the four living creatures represent the praise of the redeemed *throughout* the entire creation, so the plagues of the four horsemen are symbolic of the suffering of many throughout the earth, which will continue until the final return of Christ. That the horsemen's plagues are representative of all kinds of woes is clear from observing that the fourfold Old Testament covenant curse formula cited in the second half of Revelation 6:8 (“to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by

the wild beasts of the earth”) is used in the same figurative manner in the Old Testament. In addition to the fact that the figurative meaning of “four” stands for completeness, Israel was threatened with many more curses than four in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. This is why no single historical background can exhaust the meaning of these judgments in Revelation 6.

Understanding the Unfaithfulness of Nations That Elicits God's Judgment

The fourth seal must be understood in light of Ezekiel 14:21, since it is one of the few Old Testament quotations in Revelation (most references to the Old Testament in Revelation are allusions). The context of Ezekiel 14:13–23 is crucial in understanding v. 21. In Ezekiel 14:13–14, God says that if any “country sins against me by committing unfaithfulness . . . I [will] stretch out my hand against it . . . [and] send famine . . . even though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in its midst, by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves.” This same scenario is repeated three more times but “wild beasts,” “sword,” and “plague” is substituted respectively for “famine” (14:15–20). Thus, in God's common grace realm or realm of general revelation, he punished “unfaithfulness” with these four plagues, sometimes simultaneously and perhaps sometimes not. Then, God says with respect to Israel, the community of his special revelation, “how much more when I send My four evil judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague to cut off man and beast from it!” (Ezek. 14:21, my translation).

In other words, when Israel commits “sins” of “unfaithfulness,” they will undergo even more intense judgment than the nations experience for such sins. Probably, the principle is that those who reject special revelation will experience a greater degree of judgment than those outside the covenant community who have no exposure to such revelation.

One major take away from Ezekiel 14 is that these punishments on unbelieving “countries” in the common grace realm were apparently a reality in Old Testament times. Does God’s punishment of countries for unfaithfulness carry over to today? There is no reason to think that such punishments would cease in the era following Christ’s coming. Three things do cease: Israel as a theocratic nation, the laws pertaining to the temple, and Israel’s land. Instead, Jesus and the church become the continuation of true Israel, the temple, and land (the latter in the sense that the promises about inheritance in the land become tied in to Jesus as the beginning of the new creation and to those identified with Jesus).

So, even without considering how John uses Ezekiel 14:21 in Revelation 6:8, the reality that God punishes nations for excessive “unfaithfulness” continues. This “unfaithfulness” can be any excessive sin. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated above as “unfaithfulness” was especially associated with the sin of idolatry.¹ Romans 1 says that God punishes people because of the sin of excessive idol worship, both in the Old Testament epoch and in the New Testament epoch. This punishment was expressed in God giving people “over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper” (e.g., unnatural sexual relations, “wickedness, greed . . . envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice . . . insolent, arrogant” [Rom. 1:28–32]).

Ezekiel 14 highlights the punishments of “sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague.” These four punishments can happen simultaneously or separately. The “plague” of COVID-19, I believe, is a manifestation of God’s punishment on many nations of the earth. It comes because the leaders of nations and many of the people in those nations have turned their back on God and substituted him with some other object of trust (economic, political, etc.), that is, they have committed acts of “unfaithfulness.” It comes also because nations have perverted God’s

moral standards. God does not always punish nations in this way because of his mysterious grace, but even then they deserve to be so treated. We can also say, ultimately, such disaster is a judgmental ramification of a fallen world, stemming from the first Adam’s sin.

Understanding How God Uses the Plagues as Judgments to Harden or Trials to Refine

But is the “plague” of COVID-19 only a divine punishment? John’s quotation of Ezekiel 14:21 in Revelation 6:8 further indicates that the “plague” has another and entirely different purpose.

Ezekiel 14:22–23 expresses this different purpose:

“Yet, behold, survivors will be left in it who will be brought out, both sons and daughters. Behold, they are going to come forth to you and you will see their conduct and actions; then you will be comforted for the calamity which I have brought against Jerusalem for everything which I have brought upon it. Then they will comfort you when you see their conduct and actions, for you will know that I have not done in vain whatever I did to it,” declares the Lord GOD.

While God uses the four judgments to judge unbelievers both among the nations and, especially, in Israel, he uses the same trial to refine the faith of a remnant of true believers.²

Recall that Ezekiel 14:21, “I [will] send my four evil judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague to cut off man” (my translation), equals the second part of Revelation 6:8, “Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.”

Civil wars (the second horseman) and famines (the third horseman) affect people throughout the nations suffering from them, both unbelievers and believers. Likewise, “plagues” (pandemics) strike a multitude of people

in the nations affected. For unbelievers, the “plague” is punishment, further hardening them against God. For believers, the “plague” is a trial refining the faith of God’s true, remnant people by causing them to turn to him for help to endure the trial. Yes, COVID-19 is a judgment on nations, but it is also an instrument to refine the faith of God’s people living in those nations.

There is a third group of people. They are unbelievers who are moved to ask to be delivered from the hardening effect of the virus and turn to God and become those whose true faith begins to be refined by the trial.

While it is true that the trials of the four horsemen affect both unbelievers and believers among nations, John’s focus is more on the covenant community, as was Ezekiel’s (recall Ezekiel 14:21, “how much more when I send my four evil judgments *against Jerusalem*” [my translation] where vv. 21–23 is the main point of vv. 13–23). This means that John views the covenant community to be a visible one composed of confessing believers, some of whom are truly Christians and some of whom are only “confessors” and not true believers. While all suffer the same “plague” physically, the latter suffer the hardening aspect of the judgment, while the former have their faith refined and strengthened by the trial.

So far I have discussed Revelation’s first four “seals” as large-scale trials that affect many people on earth, such as COVID-19. But how are we to think of smaller-scale, though significant trials, such as the suffering and death caused by airplane crashes, tornados, hurricanes, volcanos, 9/11, and so on? Scripture elsewhere teaches that “all things,” global pandemics, smaller-scale disasters, and even individual suffering, “work together for good, for those who are called according to his [God’s] purpose” (Rom. 8:28 *esv*). This would include trials refining the faith of believers, as the “seal” trials were seen to do.

The life of Joseph is a good Old Testament example of an individual’s

personal trial. He was sold into slavery by his brothers and then wrongly imprisoned by his Egyptian master. After God blesses and exalts him, he says to his brothers, “you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20). Furthermore, Psalm 105:18–19 says about Joseph, “they afflicted him with fetters; he himself was laid in irons, until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the Lord refined him” (my translation). And, on the other hand, such smaller catastrophes serve to harden unbelievers and pseudo-believers in the covenant community.

Conclusion

The first four seals portray the beginning fulfillment of the end-time trials that were prophesied in the Old Testament—remember that unsealing is setting in motion the prophecies of Daniel. However, the first four seals are not the culmination of the final trials leading up to Christ’s final coming. But, when we begin to see a greater spread, intensification and escalation over time of the wars, famines, and plagues of the seals, then we can begin to expect that the very final end is upon us.

Perhaps an example of considering the expectation of the Antichrist may be helpful. 1 John 2:18 says, “Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour.” The reference to “even now many antichrists have arisen” shows that John believed that Old Testament end-time prophecy about the Antichrist had begun to be fulfilled, and would be fulfilled throughout the church age. But John also says that the final incarnate “Antichrist is coming” at the very end of the age. The “many antichrists” that “have arisen” refer to the false teachers in the church community to which John is writing. They are called “antichrists” because they are inspired by “the spirit of the Antichrist,” who will finally come (1 John 4:3). Throughout the age whenever an antichrist figure

has arisen, some of these figures have become so like the final incarnate Antichrist that believers have thought that this was the final Antichrist and that Christ’s coming would, therefore, occur soon. However, these antichrist figures did not turn out to be the final fulfillment of the prophecy of Antichrist. But there will come an antichrist figure who is like the rest, but then, suddenly, he will intensify and escalate to become “The Final Antichrist.” The complete fulfillment of the Antichrist prophecy from the Old Testament will occur so quickly that believers probably will not have much time to contemplate whether or not it is this figure that is really the final fulfillment, though they will realize it as the fulfillment is completed, as quick as that may be.

A good comparison of what trials leading up to the very end of history will be like is birth pangs. A pregnant woman may feel “false” labor pains several months before she actually gives birth. While the false pains can be uncomfortable, they can also be confusing. Because they can be accompanied by a significant degree of pain (I am told), the mother might think she is in labor. However, these false labor pains go away. Once actual labor pains leading to birth start, it is different. It is pain that does not go away. The pain intensifies until the baby is born.

This is the way it will be with the trials of the four seals. They are like the early labor pains, but they will intensify, spread, and get worse over time, to the point that some will think the final end of the world and Christ’s final coming must be around the corner. However the trials will once again decrease until they start again and intensify and spread and finally, indeed suddenly, reach a peak, at which point the end of the world and final coming of Christ occurs.

What should be the mission of the church during a pandemic like COVID-19? The answer lies in Revelation 6:9, which directly follows the fourth seal: “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God

and for the witness they had borne” (ESV). As elsewhere in Revelation, a following vision (as in Rev. 6:9) interprets part of a preceding declaration (as in Rev. 6:1–8, though part of it is also a vision). Whereas the first four seals depict the world’s sufferings from the perspective of the heavenly decree of God, the fifth seal describes the response of deceased and glorified saints to these sufferings. These saints in Revelation 6:9 had suffered through the first four seals and had died due to persecution in the midst of the plagues or due to the plagues themselves (brought on by the satanic agents of the demonic horsemen).³ Their activity leading up to their death was “witnessing” to Christ.

In dire times, people are looking for answers, and the best answer is to entrust oneself into Christ’s hands and begin to trust that suffering is used by him to “refine” one’s faith. We in the church should be ready to give this message to a dying world, and we should be prepared to give our witness in the midst of suffering, even suffering leading to our death. □

The author is an Orthodox Presbyterian minister and J. Gresham Machen Chair and research professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary. He quotes from the NASB 1977, except where noted.

1. The Hebrew word *mā’al* in Ezek. 14:13 is usually translated as “to commit unfaithfulness” and is used elsewhere to refer to the sin of idolatry: see the verb form in 1 Chron. 5:25; 2 Chron. 28:19, 22; 36:14; Ezra 10:2, 10 (in light of Ezra 9); both verb and noun form are used in Ezek. 18:24 (cf. 18:14) and Ezek. 20:27; see the noun form in Ezra 9:4; 10:6 (in light of Ezra 9).

2. Most commentators see the remnant not to be a believing remnant, except for Cooper, *Ezekiel* (1994, p. 165); I also see the remnant to be a faithful group, though will not attempt to prove that further here.

3. It is possible that only literal martyrs are in mind, but more likely those who are “slain” are metaphorical and represent the broader category of all saints who have suffered through the trials for the sake of their faith and died (so Rev. 13:15–18 and perhaps 18:24; 20:4).

NOT AFRAID OF BAD NEWS



A. CRAIG TROXEL // “Let’s not kid ourselves, this is not good news.” Those were the words I spoke to Heather Bosgraf as her parents, Jim and Judy, her sister, Kim, and I stood around her hospital bed. Heather had recently won an extended bout with cancer—or so we thought—but her foe had appeared again, and this

time it came with a vengeance. Here she was back in the hospital, minutes away from undergoing brain surgery. It was one of those moments when no one, not even a talkative pastor, has words. So I read Psalm 112:6–8:

For the righteous will never be moved;
he will be remembered forever.

He is not afraid of bad news; his heart
is firm, trusting in the LORD.

His heart is steady; he will not be
afraid, until he looks in triumph on
his adversaries.

We briefly talked about these verses and then prayed together, asking the Lord to see Heather through the surgery successfully and to strengthen her believing heart. That was the last conversation I ever had with Heather. She never fully awoke from the surgery and died soon after on June 21, 2008. Since then I have turned to this passage many times to encourage others in their faith when things were looking bad. But I will always see these three verses as Heather’s.

It is a remarkable thing that the psalmist claims—this righteous believer whose “heart is firm” and whose “his heart is steady” so that “he is not afraid of bad news.” Where does this strength of heart and faith come from?

The Heart’s Will

Let’s begin by understanding what the Bible means by the word “heart.” We tend to associate the heart almost exclusively with our emotions. God says it is much more than that. “Heart” is the Bible’s most frequently used word to describe the totality of our inner self. We can think of it as the control center of our life. As goes the heart, so goes the person. Every function of our spiritual life originates from this one point of unity (Prov. 4:23). At the same time, this unity also has a threefold complexity of functions, which we can think of as the heart’s *mind* (our knowledge, ideas, and imagination), *desires* (our longings, feelings, and affections), and *will* (our volitional strength or weakness; our determination or surrender, our courage

or fear). Or to put it another way, the heart controls what we *know*, what we *love*, and what we *choose*. It is the heart’s will—the volitional function of the heart—that Psalm 112:6–8 has in view.

The will of our heart can be either weak or strong. It either yields to temptation or resists it. It either surrenders to God’s way or stubbornly fights against it. It is either enslaved or set free. It is either immobilized by fear or stalwart in courage. It decides whether we will say yes or say no. As is the strength of the will, so is the heart of that person (Judg. 8:21; 1 Sam. 2:1).

Ultimately, such decisions are dictated by whether a person is a Christian or not—in other words, whether their heart is “born again” (John 3:3) or hardened by sin (Eph. 4:18). Thus, the unbelieving heart stubbornly struggles against God even as it weakly caves to sin. It fears man, but not God who made man. Thus, this heart is unstable, because it is not established or built upon anything solid. Instead, the unbelieving heart looks to things that perish,

things that can be stolen or destroyed (Matt. 6:20). When bad news threatens, it sees everything it has put its hope in crumble before its eyes. In the end, the unbelieving heart melts with fear.

His Heart Is Firm

The believing heart is different. The issue boils down to what we trust in. Faith is not merely about knowledge (the heart's mind) or love (the heart's desire), but also about what we choose (the heart's will). That being so, in what do we choose to place our confidence and to whom do we ultimately yield?

Jesus was clear that it is not the size of our faith but the object of our faith that matters: "For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you" (Matt. 17:20). As John Murray wrote, it is not faith that saves. It is faith in Jesus Christ that saves. Remember how Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount? He said that the person who "hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock." And though "the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house" it "did not fall." Why? Because it was "founded on the rock" (Matt. 7:24–25).

Jesus is saying, "Trust in me! Build your life upon me!" Whoever believes in him will never hunger or thirst (John 6:35), will never die (11:25), and will not remain in darkness (12:46), and their hearts need not "be troubled" (14:1).

The heart of the believer is set upon the Lord, trusting that God will be true to himself, to his promises, and to his people. Those whose confidence is in God cannot be moved. The worst that life can throw at them will not topple them. They show unnatural stability amidst the whirling commotion. Their foundation is sure because their faith is grounded in Christ. Faith is a saving grace by which we "receive and rest upon" Jesus Christ alone for salva-

tion (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. 86). In faith we rest in him and yield to him. Here is the strength of the Christian's heart. Here is the bedrock of our life.

Psalm 112 commends this righteous believer as the one who "will never be moved." Their heart is "firm" and "steady," because they are "trusting in the Lord." This explains the strength of their will and why this believer "will not be afraid"—even in the face of bad news. It is because their confidence is not in the news, which changes constantly and proves unreliable. Their faith is in God, the "Rock of Israel," who does not change (2 Sam. 23:3; Isa. 30:29).

The righteous have always known this and have placed their hope in God accordingly. Daniel's heart was set upon serving the Lord (Dan. 1:8; 10:12). Ezra "set his heart" to study God's Law (Ezra 7:10). Ezekiel set his heart on what God had revealed (Ezek. 40:4). Ruth's heart "was determined" to go with Naomi (Ruth 1:18). And then there is Job, who had heard the worst of news—not just the loss of all his property, but the death of his beloved children—and yet his unwavering faith was anchored in the Lord. His heart remained fixed upon his God. True faith is not *merely* about our knowing what is right. It also involves our sticking to what is right—no matter how bad the news is. To walk by faith means to be "always of good courage" (2 Cor. 5:6).

We have professed to follow Christ and to build our lives upon him. We are committed to bow before his purpose in our lives—whether his purpose appears to us as his bright countenance or as his frowning providence. It all works together for our good (Rom. 8:28). Even bad news will supply a vital thread to a good ending. "To the pure, all things are pure" (Titus 1:15). No matter what kind of reports we hear or what kind of circumstances we face, we "will never be moved" as we continue trusting in the Lord (Ps. 112:6). The firmness of our faith, the steadiness of our heart, and the steadfastness of our courage must not waver due to the

course of events or trends around us.

Unceasing Unrest Until the End

Everything about this world—its seasons, its history, its civilizations, its kingdoms, its news—is constantly changing. Consequently, we routinely revise our plans, investments, and strategies to accommodate this unceasing metamorphosis of our world; much of which comes to us through the relentless assault of headlines, gossip, rumors, this story and that story. Let us be honest, we are too easily influenced by the things that we hear, and they often unsettle us. In those moments we are walking by sight, and not by faith.

Let us walk by faith. Let us look to what cannot be moved. We trust in the Rock of our salvation and his word which "will stand forever" (Isa. 40:8). The source and the renewal of our strength lies in "the strength of his might" (Eph. 6:10; see also Isa. 40:31). If God is our strength and a "very present help in trouble," then "we will not fear" (Ps. 46:1–2). If he is the stronghold of our lives, of whom will we be afraid? (Ps. 27:1). Even if we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil (Ps. 23:4).

But to put things into perspective, none of the turbulence that we see, or the news that we hear in our day, compares to the great day that is coming. On that day, the Word of the Lord will shake the heavens and the earth so that what is immovable might remain (Heb. 12:27). We have been received into a kingdom that cannot be shaken, because it is built upon Christ, the cornerstone. All who trust in him are like living stones, built upon the one who cannot be moved. Because of him, our hearts are firm and steady. Because of him, we need not be afraid. Because of him, what we believe in truly is good news. □

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THE BIBLE AND BLACK LIVES MATTER



ERIC B. WATKINS // In the aftermath of the death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, a movement known as Black Lives Matter (BLM) has taken the spotlight. BLM now has the power, financial backing, and widespread influence to rival any current political party. The movement has united people across racial, ethnic, and

gender barriers in a remarkable way. An overwhelming number of white millennials have been drawn to the movement, but perhaps what has been most noteworthy is the number of evangelical Christians and churches who have begun supporting BLM. This article will attempt to explain the sudden surge of interest in BLM, the theology and ideology of BLM, and finally the doctrine of the church in the context of BLM.

Why the Sudden Interest in BLM?

The day George Floyd died, he immediately became the symbol of the movement. His death at the hands of a police officer was tragic, gut-wrenching, and unforgettable. There have been many instances of alleged police brutality in recent years. When, in particular, the officer involved was white and the suspect was black, media outlets immediately rushed to label these events as a part of “systemic racial injustice.” In many, if not most, of these cases, juries would later find the police officer innocent and acting in self-defense. But in the case of George Floyd, a black man

was slowly “choked out” over the span of more than eight minutes—and it was all caught on video. This last point is key: the fact that George Floyd’s death was recorded on video not only made it possible for the world to become witness and jury; it sent a flash of emotional fire through the veins of millions of people. George Floyd became the instant symbol of BLM and brought the conflict to a world stage like never before.

It is important, however, to note that there has been no actual evidence offered to prove that George Floyd’s death was *racially* motivated, nor have the full investigation and trial been completed. But Floyd was black, and the officer was white; and for many people that is enough. The media and BLM almost immediately imputed racial motives to the officer, and most of the world embraced the racially charged rhetoric. As a person and pastor of mixed ethnicity, I find it troubling that every time a black person is arrested or killed by an officer in the line of duty, it is almost immediately assumed to be an instance of “systemic racial injustice.”

Who can know another person’s heart, and whether all these instances were racially motivated? Perhaps they were, but perhaps they were not. Perhaps the event had nothing to do with skin color at all. Racism is a sin of the heart, but that does not mean that racism is in the heart of every person who commits certain sins.

In an effort to fairly represent BLM sympathizers, we should note the troubling statistics that while black people make up about 13% of the American population, they account for a disproportionately high number of police-incident related deaths (“[Deaths Due to Use of Lethal Force by Law Enforcement](#),” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 51 [2016]). In addition, blacks are disproportionately stopped or arrested by police—more than whites and more than any other ethnicity (“[Deaths from Police](#),” *US News*, June 3, 2020). This data underlies the perspective that black people are disproportionately profiled, arrested, and mistreated. If this is seen against the broader historical narrative of the Civil Rights Era, and the

even more difficult history of antebellum slavery in America, we can better understand the perspective of BLM sympathizers, and why the death of George Floyd galvanized the movement.

Yet, while grieving and decrying what blacks have endured (and some still endure), it is still troubling to see evangelical Christians embrace a movement that is at odds with Christianity at several points.

The Theology/Ideology of BLM

BLM has a far wider scope than addressing incidents of perceived racial injustice and discrimination. According to the “herstory” page of their website (a play on “history”), the movement specifically gives center stage not just to black people but to black queer and trans people. BLM stands diametrically opposed to the biblical doctrines of creation, gender, and the Christian definition of the family. Many black leaders (pastors, politicians, etc.) have strongly criticized BLM for not advocating for unborn black children. In their view, if black lives matter, the lives of unborn black babies should matter most (see “[Three Reasons Why Planned Parenthood Does Not Support Black Lives](#),” [Illinoisrighttolife.org](#)). To be fair, not all BLM supporters have a good relationship with Planned Parenthood.

The underlying theology of BLM is rather synthetic, building on the ideologies of radical feminism, West African spiritualism (divination), as well as Liberation Theology. In many ways, BLM is the epitome of secular postmodernism wedded to the story of the black experience in America. Postmodernism resists clear definition and embodies a defiant relationship to the authoritative and historical institutions that are perceived to hold people captive to unwanted definitions and social structures. BLM embodies this postmodern ethos well, including its elastic, “decentralized” leadership structure (according to their website).

To the extent that Jesus is positively referenced by BLM leaders, it is done so through the lens of Liberation Theology.

As [Hawk Newsom](#), the New York City BLM president, said in a June 2020 interview with FOX, “Jesus Christ is the most famous black radical revolutionary in history. And he was treated just like Dr. King. He was arrested on occasion and he was also crucified or assassinated. This is what happens to black activists. We are killed by the government.” The tendency to reduce Jesus to a social liberator, a “radical revolutionary,” is a regrettable perversion of the gospel story because it makes Jesus little more than a political activist with a horizontal mission (social justice) rather than a vertical one (redemptive salvation).

BLM is often accused of promoting violence. A word of caution is urged here, as the BLM website is very clear that it does not. In fact, it attempts to police media outlets, writers, and others that represent BLM as advocating for violence. That said, its leaders are not always clear or consistent. On this point, Hawk Newsom said in the same interview, “If this country doesn’t give us what we want, then we will burn down this system and replace it. All right? And I could be speaking figuratively. I could be speaking literally . . . I just want black liberation and black sovereignty, by any means necessary.” Those are strong words, especially given the number of buildings and businesses that have *literally* been burned down by rioters during BLM protests. So while the BLM website insists upon non-violent actions (including protests), some of their leaders sound more physically threatening. The greatest concern is what is actually happening on the streets, where too often protests have turned into violent riots in which property has been destroyed and lives have been lost—all while BLM signs, flags, and t-shirts are seen throughout the crowds.

The Church and BLM

In his wonderful 1966 book *The Church*, Edmund Clowney wrote as though he were living in our day and watching current events. He observed that the World Council of Churches was suggesting that “the mission of the

church was to support revolutionary movements by participating in them and bearing witness from within” (156). Driven by its infatuation with Liberation Theology, the World Council of Churches had surrendered to a worldly gospel—the social gospel—and reinterpreted the cross of Christ in the light of Marxist social ideals. Liberation Theology then, in a manner very similar to BLM advocates now, co-opted the cross as its “sign of revolution” but reduced its agenda to racial and gender issues, environmentalism, and other social concerns. The gospel had been flattened. In the light of the Civil Rights movement, a World Council of Churches report concluded, “A reconciled and renewed creation is the goal of the church’s mission” (156). In that view, our eschatology is here on earth and would be achieved by the social gospel.

To be clear, Clowney condemned racism and prayed for true justice in the world as an outworking of loving God and loving our neighbor. He believed that “the heart of the gospel moves the church to mission and to deeds of mercy which have always been part of the Christian mission” (161). But he also warned, “To accommodate its mission to the underlying assumption of multiculturalism and radical feminism or even ecclesiastical ritualism is to repeat the mistake of the older liberalism by turning to another gospel” (165). Never have Clowney’s words been more relevant and helpful than today. The church, especially broad evangelicalism, for all its interest in social justice, stands on the slippery slope that descends into the political abyss of the social gospel. We need to fix our eyes again on Christ, the gospel, and a biblically Reformed doctrine of the church and its mission. Nothing demonstrates the justice and mercy of God like the cross of Jesus Christ. Protests and riots cannot ultimately change hearts, but the gospel always does, and that is why the church’s mission is to proclaim it. □

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STORIES TO CAPTURE A CHILD'S HEART



RACHEL E. CRUM // There is real power in the simplicity of a children's story and the beauty of its illustrations. Sally Lloyd-Jones, author of *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, writes that "stories don't tell the truth confrontationally . . . [they] come around the side and capture your heart." If we're worried that our children won't learn

enough from stories, we can remember that the beauty of the Bible is wrapped up in its story. Stories don't need to explicitly teach a lesson, because stories in their essence point to the greatest story of all: the gospel.

So what books can we use to capture our children's hearts with the story of the gospel? Here are a few recommendations of recent publications for children ages one to six.



Stories for the Very Littles

One of my favorite board book series for the littlest members of our congregations is the six-book *Baby Believer series* by Danielle Hitchen (Harvest House). Each one features simple language and Bible verses. For example, in *Psalms of Praise*, each spread features

an action word like "run" or "jump" with a verse from a psalm that includes that word. *Let There Be Light* is a book about opposites themed around Creation; each set of pages has two words such as "dark" and "light," "wet" and "dry," or "day" and "night," with a verse from Genesis's creation account. Many of the illustrations in this series are beautiful and absolutely stir the soul. (Some include depictions of Jesus.)

Another board book series I enjoyed is the *God Made series* by Sarah Jean Collins (Tyndale). These books have bright, geometric pictures, and fun, rhyming text, which is really nice for toddlers. *God Made the World* walks through the six days of creation and the seventh day of rest; *God Made the Ocean* tells us about all the ocean animals God has created; and *God Made the Rainforest* explores the many creatures of the rainforest.



The Biggest Story ABC by Kevin DeYoung, a board book, works through the story of redemption using the letters of the alphabet, with one sentence per letter, from Adam to Zion. Each letter helps to tell the gospel story in a colorful and simple to understand way.

Found: Psalm 23 and *Loved: The Lord's Prayer* (Zondervan), are board books by Sally Lloyd-Jones that paraphrase Scripture—a third on Psalm 139 releases in January. The paraphrases do not contain lines from these familiar passages, which is disappointing. However, the illustrations are lovely, and I appreciate the way that they bring Scripture to children, helping them to see the beautiful relationship we have with our God and Creator.

Stories for the Next Size Up

The World Is Awake: A Celebration of Everyday Blessings by Linsey Davis (Zondervan) is a sweet, rhyming story that follows the day of a family as they wake up, go to the zoo, eat dinner, and go to bed, all while noticing God's handiwork in all of creation and the many gifts he gives to us.

The Moon Is Always Round by Westminster Seminary professor Jonathan Gibson (New Growth Press) is a beautiful story about faith despite loss as a family responds to a stillbirth. The dad tells the older



brother that just like the moon is always round, so God is always good, even when we can't see it. The illustrations are not particularly appealing to me, but the story is moving, especially for those who have suffered and lost loved ones.

Jesus Came for Me and *Jesus Rose for Me* by Jared Kennedy (New Growth Press) each contain multiple stories excerpted from *The Beginner's Gospel Story Bible*, also by Kennedy. Even though they are board books, they'll be appreciated by children as old as kindergarten. The stories are short with a simple gospel message and end with a discussion question. I would use these two books for Christmas and Easter to help my kids understand Christ's birth, death, and resurrection. (Some include depictions of Jesus.)

Finally, my favorite series for this age is *Tales That Tell the Truth* (The Good Book Company). These ten books have different authors but the same illustrator, giving them a sense of unity. And the illustrations are incredible! Colorful and childlike, there are lots of



things happening on the pages to draw children into an exciting story. (Some include depictions of Jesus.) *Jesus and the Very Big Surprise* is a wonderful story written by children's musician Randall Goodgame (a favorite in this home!) about the way Jesus surprises us, turning notions of what a Savior should look like upside down. It reminds us that Jesus's return will also be a surprise.

The Garden, the Curtain, and the

Cross is a bit more theological, but in a wonderful, engaging, and childlike manner. It ties together the separation from God that happened in the garden when Adam and Eve sinned, the separation from God in the temple with the curtain, and the restoring of God's people to his presence in the cross. The cross, it tells us,

is the thing that rips down the barriers and allows us to live with him.

The Tales That Tell the Truth series has the kinds of books that we need to fill our homes with—books that remind us of the exciting, strange, and wonderful nature of the Bible, the beauty of the world God has made, and the glorious story of the gospel.

Books for Teaching

There are some books for children that are meant to serve as lessons. These books are not stories, but rather tools for communicating important truths to children.

One notable example is the God Made series (New Growth Press). These books can come off as didactic because of their format; in one, a mom and dad sit down to teach their kids, and in another, it's a Sunday school teacher. Despite this, they have some good elements for conversation starters.

God Made All of Me: A Book to Help Children Protect Their Bodies talks through privacy and body safety. While this is an important conversation to have with our kids, I would pull this book out only at

designated times and not leave it out for my children to read independently because some sections are clearly meant for parents only. *God Made Me and You: Celebrating God's Design for Ethnic Diversity* uses fun rhyming text to talk about our common parents in Adam and Eve and the way God made everything in the world to be diverse—different trees, different animals, different colors. This could be a great book

to pull out to talk about racism. There are other books in the series for different occasions, such as *God Made Me Unique*, *God Made Boys and Girls*, *God Made Me for Heaven*, *God Made Me for Worship*, and *God Made Me in His Image*. These are not stories, though, and are suited best for one-time teaching opportunities rather than for regular reading and rereading.

Other books for teaching would be *Reformation ABCs* by Stephen J. Nichols, *The Ology* by Marty Machowski, and *Thoughts to Make Your Heart Sing* by Sally Lloyd-Jones. All are aimed at early elementary-age children. *Reformation ABCs* walks through landmarks and people of the Reformation, such as Heidelberg for the letter H and Indulgences for the letter I. It has one page of text per letter of the alphabet, and is useful for teaching kids about the Reformation, perhaps while studying it in school or leading up to Reformation Day during the month of October. *The Ology* contains seventy-one short lessons in theology for kids, divided into sections such as "The Ology of God," "The Ology of Sin," "The Ology of the Church," and each lesson has an accompanying Scripture verse. These would be great to use as part of school or family devotions and are the perfect jumping-off point for talking through different aspects of Scripture and our faith. *Thoughts to Make Your Heart Sing* is a wonderful little devotional with short gospel thoughts to encourage your children. I love reading this with my kids, and often find myself more encouraged by it than they are.

There's nothing I love better than a good children's book. No matter our age, stories are experiences of the heart, changing us and captivating us. They fill us with amazement and joy at the world and the God who made it. Most of all, they help us see in a new or different way the story that God has written for us, a story so full of his redemptive love that he even opens up the pages and steps into it himself. □

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TAMING THE TONGUE IN AN ANGRY AGE

// JOHN S. SHAW



We live in a world that is deeply divided and eager to express it. That seems almost too obvious if we are awake at all to current events. Whatever the issue—politics, the economy, the presidential election, a worldwide pandemic, or deep racial unrest—people are angry, and that anger pours out through their fingers and their mouths.

The church should be different. The Bible repeatedly calls attention to the danger of an unfettered tongue. Reckless words wound and destroy. And while Christians are called to speak the truth in its fullness, we are called to speak in ways that stand out as different—using speech that characterizes the heavenly kingdom to which we belong. The church should speak the truth in love, using words that heal rather than destroy. Even in our Christian witness, as we give reason for the hope that we possess, we are called to do so with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15). Indeed, how we speak profoundly impacts that gospel witness. We can't speak words that destroy in one context and then expect the world to receive life-giving words from us in another.

So, in this fall of 2020, we need to ask some difficult questions. Does the church today speak in ways that stand in stark contrast to the world? Or has the church borrowed the destructive rhetoric of the culture in which we live? Do we speak in life-giving, life-affirming ways? Or do we use the tongue to hurt?

The Tongue's Power

We receive significant instruction on the proper use of the tongue in James 3:1–12. Any Christian who has carefully read this passage knows it to be hard teaching. The Holy Spirit speaking through the Word exposes sin (Heb. 4:12–13) and calls for repentance that overflows in new obedience. This is dangerous but necessary work for us.

So what does James say about the tongue?

First, the tongue exerts disproportionate power. James uses vivid illustrations to make his point: the tongue is like a small bit that commands a powerful horse, or a very small rudder that guides a large ship. The tongue is a small member, “yet it boasts of great things” (v. 5). We underestimate its power at great personal risk.

Second, the tongue possesses devastating power. Again, James uses vivid illustrations. Just like a small fire or a little spark can set a whole forest ablaze, the tongue can threaten human lives and souls. An untamed tongue stains whole bodies, unleashing a world of unrighteousness that James compares to the fires of hell, threatening the entire course of life. The tongue has the power to destroy.

Third, the tongue possesses a dividing power. With the same tongue, Christians both worship God and attack men and women made in God's image. James finds this practice to be completely confounding. “These things ought not to be so,” he writes (v. 10). His illustrations make one simple point: when you talk in this way, your speech doesn't match the doctrine you profess. Springs of living water produce fresh water, and healthy trees produce healthy fruit. Any attempt to live a divided life is not the Christian life at all. How you speak to and about others is a key indicator of whether you have a new heart from the Father above. (Consider Matt. 12:33–37 as well.)

Here is where the rubber meets the road, both for our Christian life and our Christian witness. If we bless God and curse others with the same tongue, there are serious spiritual questions to ask. What makes us think it is permissible to speak in this way about others, both in private and in public? If that is the regular character of the speech of Christians and the church, why would we expect the world to hear us? If we simply adopt the speech patterns of the world rather than the speech patterns of the kingdom of God, why *should* anyone hear us?

Notice which key doctrine James uses as a foundation for Christian patterns of speech: that men and women are made in the image of God. We are the crown of God's perfect creation and a reflection of him. For that reason, and for the sake of our heavenly Father, men and women are worth knowing, worth loving, and worth loving and affirming with our speech. And lest we miss the point, he is speaking of all men and women,

not merely Christians. How we speak to and about others reflects how we view our Father in heaven.

The Tongue and Social Media

So let's briefly consider two areas of application: social media and the current worldwide pandemic.

Social media seems to be designed for flaunting the instruction of James 3. The pattern for social media communication is unfettered, unmeasured speech. Both in content and tone, people seem to speak in ways that draw more eyes and a more intense response, especially when writing about religion or politics. Too often, Christians simply jump into the communication fray, throwing caution to the wind. We seem to forget that behind the computer screens sit human beings who possess not only fingers to type the responses that we disagree with, but also a soul that will never die, created in the image of our good God. They don't exist for us to tear down.

In training our children, my wife and I regularly encouraged them to consider three things before they spoke: whether what they were about to say was true, whether it was necessary, and whether it was kind. When arguments occurred, we used those same standards to review the speech that led to the argument. Those three simple rules might help us all to speak well on social media.

Also helpful is the warning in Matthew 12:36–37 that on the day of judgment, we will give account for every careless word we speak, and by those same words, we will be justified or condemned. Recently, I needed to confess to a friend and seek his forgiveness for careless words spoken between the two of us. How much more should we wrestle with careless words spoken on social media before possibly hundreds or thousands! We read in Proverbs 12:18: "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." Those would be good words to run as a banner at the top of our screens, to consider every time before we post.

So what should you do, when the world of social media is pulling you in an unfaithful direction? Test your words. Think, review, and reread before posting or tweeting. And if you keep failing the test, consider whether you need to participate in social media at all. Don't play games with social media, endangering your soul and damaging your witness.

The Tongue and COVID-19

The challenges of our current worldwide pandemic present particular temptations to misuse our tongue. There is much that we do not yet know about the dangers of the spread and impact of COVID-19. Our government leaders struggle under

the weight of so many unknowns. They have made and will continue to make mistakes. Who among us wouldn't under such pressure? The temptation is to attack, criticize, and demean; even to rebel. How does the instruction from James, alongside the rest of Scripture, help us? We are called to submit and respect, even when we disagree, to speak well of those in authority as we are able, to pray for them, and to be guided by the two great commandments: love of God and love of neighbor. Before we speak with anger about those in authority, we must consider those biblical commands. We should consider the same things before posting or tweeting about these leaders with inflammatory language.

Perhaps closer to home, we also need to consider how James's instruction helps us to live with each other in the church during COVID-19 restrictions. Church officers are currently responding to constantly changing rules and recommendations from government officials and considering how those orders apply to the church. They are striving to apply biblical wisdom in designing new procedures to protect our Christian liberties while also protecting our most vulnerable members and loving our neighbors well.

The temptation for us is to introduce the disagreements and divides of the world into the church, even as we consider how best to worship the God who brought us out of the world. There are strong opinions. Meet or don't meet? Masks or no masks? Distanced or not distanced? Outside or inside? How sad would it be to allow our differing opinions to create division and frustration in the life of the church! To allow fighting and biting and devouring (Gal. 4:15). To allow arguing and disputing and complaining against the leaders God has appointed. We might respond to such divisions with the words of our elder brother, James: "These things ought not to be so."

The gospel offers us a different and a better way: to consider others more significant than ourselves; to look to the interests of others (even when their interests conflict with our opinions on secondary matters); and to have the mind of our Savior, who humbled himself and was obedient to the point of death on a cross (Phil. 2:1–11). We should consider carefully the instruction of Hebrews 13:17 to obey and submit to those leaders appointed by God, and in such a way that they might serve us with joy and not with groaning.

The church ought not to respond to this pandemic in the same way as the world—with anger, fighting, and disputing—but rather by bearing with one another in love. "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Our Savior, alongside his brother, James, calls us to live differently than the world. He calls us to bear patiently, to speak kindly, and to deal generously with brothers and sisters in the Lord. In so doing, we affirm one another and shine the light of the gospel in a divided and angry world.

The author is general secretary for the Committee on Home Missions.

A Love That Unites

This article introduces a new series on outwardopc.com, "A Love That Unites." Follow along as we are challenged to love others well through our speech and actions.

FIVE YEARS WITH KARAMOJA EDUCATION OUTREACH

// ANGELA J. VOSKUIL



Angela Voskuil with students and teachers at Karamoja Education Outreach

August 2020 marked five years since my arrival at the OP mission in Karamoja, Uganda. I am thankful the Lord has directed me overseas. Through my experiences here, Christ has taught me more about himself, about others, about myself, and about life outside my own world.

A Mission-Focused Family

The second oldest of five children, I first witnessed mission work in my own family. My parents have worked with Wycliffe Bible Translators for nearly thirty years. When I was two years old, they left their tight-knit, small-town, mostly Dutch community in Wisconsin to serve as missionaries in Papua New Guinea. Soon after their return, my parents ventured out again, leaving extended family and friends behind, to begin an assignment with the technical support arm for Wycliffe Bible Translators just south of Charlotte, North Carolina. What would life have been like if God had never called my parents to leave their own hometown? Their obedience and willingness to be used by God in missions changed my life forever.

In high school, God impressed the desire for missions on my heart. No certain country or mission organization had a particular draw, but I do remember wanting to take part in what God was doing in other parts of the world.

But at that point, music was my life. I sang in choirs and competed in piano competitions. In college, I majored in music education and then took a job

teaching piano at a music studio after graduation. During my three years of teaching, I was privileged to go on two short-term summer mission trips, including one to Jinja, Uganda, where I volunteered at a home that provides care for orphaned and abandoned children and works to place them with loving Christian families. After the return home to North Carolina, God began to work on my heart, convicting me to serve somewhere in Africa. Little did I know that God's plan was to bring me back to Uganda, but this time to remote Karamoja!

I was drawn to Karamoja because of the chance to work with kids in a poor, isolated region of Uganda. My interest was piqued by the need for teachers to assist with the Karamoja Education Outreach (KEO), our mission's village preschool. I began the application process, and God opened the doors for me to begin working with the mission in Karamoja in August 2015.

The decision to pursue missions weighed on me heavily. Although it was time to move on from my job as a piano teacher, I also feared leaving behind everything that I held so close. My family, my friends, my home, my musical abilities—everything. These good things had become my identity. When that identity was removed, I suddenly felt very weak.

But God was about to show me his strength in my weakness. In Karamoja, he has provided a second family. He has provided friendships across cultures. He has provided a second home. He has provided opportunities for me to discover strengths that I did not know I possessed as well as opportunities to sing, play the piano, and teach. Above all, God has provided people and experiences to grow me in a life-altering way toward himself.



A KEO teacher working on addition; KEO is a pre-primary school

The Work of Karamoja Education Outreach

Since arriving on the field, I have worked with KEO, although my role has changed. For the first two years, I worked alongside other missionary associates, but I then transitioned to a leadership position of director/co-supervisor of the school. Leadership does not come naturally to me, but that skill has grown. Reflecting on the past few years, I can see how God has used my weakness for good. I supervise the school along with two Karimojong teachers. I rely on the wisdom, abilities, and cultural perspective of the Karimojong. We work together to manage and make decisions for the school, its children, and the thirteen KEO teachers who diligently teach. God is using our various gifts and abilities to further his kingdom work.

KEO is a pre-primary school that operates five mornings a week for local village children approximately three to eight years of age. Most children in Karamoja enter first grade with no previous education. KEO provides a jump start for students, with the support of their parents. We educate the children in literacy and numeracy and teach them Bible stories, songs, and memory verses primarily in their native tongue of Karimojong. KEO reaches more than two hundred children every week through its preschool and its primary school outreach. Alongside the preschool program, some of the KEO teachers teach Bible lessons to students in grades 1–7 at two local government-run primary schools.

Through KEO, the neighboring village children are not only learning letters and numbers, they are also learning God's Word and what it means to be a God-honoring student and member of the community. We pray that this solid foundation will have a lasting impact on their lives not only academically, but also, most importantly, spiritually. Often my days are spent helping in the classroom, teaching a Bible lesson at the local primary school, doing administrative work in the office,



Fifteen Karimojong teachers work at KEO

and co-leading teacher trainings on Mondays and teacher meetings on Thursdays, as well as being there for the teachers personally. I do many different tasks and interact with many people, but I enjoy the variety. My favorite part about the work is building relationships and interacting with the KEO teachers and kids.

Missions is a wonderful but intense and certainly sanctifying experience as we live in close community with other believers and serve people of a different

culture. I believe as Christians we have an incredible responsibility to share the love of Christ wherever we are. We are the Lord's hands and feet in a needy world, and he can use anyone to further his purposes. The work is not about us; it is about him and what he will do in and through us, despite our weakness. He gave himself for us. Are we willing to give ourselves to Jesus to be used by him, wherever we are, for his glory? What might he do through us?

The author is an associate tentmaking missionary from Rehobeth Presbyterian Church (Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church) in Waxhaw, North Carolina, laboring with the Uganda Mission in Nakaale, Karamoja, Uganda.



Students at KEO are given a jump start to first grade



Voskuil in the classroom

What's New

// Comings/Goings

Rev. and Mrs. David J. (Rashel) Robbins returned with their children, Joshua, Emmalene, Hannah, and Moru William, from Karamoja, Uganda, to the United States at the end of July 2020 for a six-month furlough.

GREAT COMMISSION PUBLICATIONS NAMES NEW DIRECTOR

On August 1, 2020, the Reverend Mark L. Lowrey Jr., was named Interim Executive Director of Great Commission Publications (GCP), the joint Sunday school and publishing ministry of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).

A ministerial member of the PCA, Mr. Lowrey joined GCP in 1996 as Director of Publications, and in 2013 he was named Associate Executive Director. Prior to his work with GCP, Mr. Lowrey founded Reformed University Fellowship in 1977, a campus ministry based on the Word of God and committed to the Reformed Faith. Mr. Lowrey replaces retiring GCP Executive Director, the Reverend E. Marvin Padgett.

GCP remains committed to the mission of serving churches during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. Please see www.gcp.org for new and ongoing resources, including downloadable Sunday school lessons, to help churches carry out Christ's Great Commission.



Mark Lowrey

Favorite Psalms and Hymns *Trinity Psalter Hymnal no. 480* "I Have No Other Comfort"

Angeline VanderBoom

In contrast to the natural evolutionist's view that we are here by chance and have no purpose in life nor hope in death, we confess the Bible's truth that we are image-bearers of God, made to know him and to enjoy him forever.

As a well catechized Reformed youth, the words of Heidelberg Catechism Question 1 have long stood in my mind, but now in my old(er) age, they have taken on a depth and resonance. The *Trinity Psalter Hymnal's* selection "I Have No Other Comfort" set the wording of this well known confession to the familiar tune of "Jerusalem, the Golden" for a memorable and comforting selection that is more loved each time I sing it.

While the world around us flails in an uncertain future, and providence reminds us daily that we are not in control, these words call out to us with clarity and conviction of who we are, and, more importantly, *whose* we are. As stanza 1 reads:

I have no other comfort which life and death endures
Than that I am my Savior's, whose death my life secures.
To you with soul and body, O Jesus, I belong;
You are my only Master and my Redeemer strong.

Whether we face an early death of a dear church member, job loss, financial uncertainty, or the general stains of sin of our earthly life, God's Word reminds us—gently, faithfully, with certainty and tenderness—that we belong to him. As we sing in stanza 3, "Whatever things betide me must serve to save my soul; the Father watches o'er me to keep me safe and whole." Nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus, and in him, all is well. What a glorious confession to hold to! What a glorious hope and comfort! Sing on, church!

● Out of the Mouth . . .

My five-year-old grandson lives with his family in New York City, where their transit is almost entirely by taxicab. Recently he woke up from a nap and out of the blue mused, "You know, in Bible times, if you wanted to see Jesus, you had to catch a camel!"

—Mari French
Wilmington, NC

Note: If you have an example of the humorous "wisdom" that can come from children, please send it to the editor.

SEPTEMBER



The Kims

1 Pray for **DAVID (JANE) CRUM**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Southern California. / Yearlong intern **SEOB (RACHEL) KIM** at Rockford Springs Community Church in Rockford, MI.

2 **HEERO & ANYA HACQUEBORD**, Lviv, Ukraine. Pray for progress in their student ministry after a canceled summer English camp. / **DANNY OLINGER**, general secretary of Christian Education.

3 Pray for **MR. AND MRS. F.**, Asia. Pray for the ongoing training of seminary students in South Korea. / **TRISH DUGGAN**, communications coordinator for Disaster Response.

4 **MICHAEL & SAMANTHA SEUFERT**, St. Paul, MN. Pray for the safety and health of the congregation at Mission OPC. / Associate **P.F.**, Asia. Pray for the teachers as they plan to resume classes.

5 **J. K.**, church-planting intern at Christ the King in Naples, FL. / Pray for the **PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED COMMISSION ON CHAPLAINS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL**, the endorsing body for OPC chaplains.

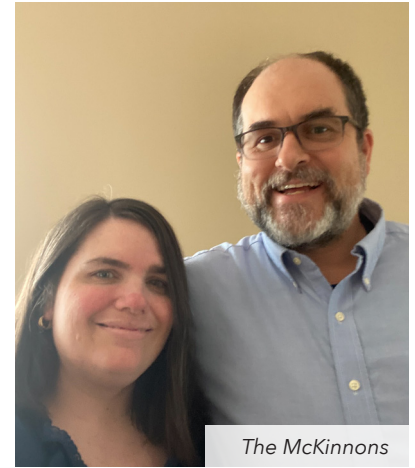
6 Pray for **MR. AND MRS. M.**, Asia, as they await the lifting of border restrictions. / Yearlong intern **SAMUEL (BETH) ALVIRA** at Providence OPC in Mantua, NJ, and Grace OPC in Pennsville, NJ.

7 **CHARLES & CONNIE JACKSON**, Mbale, Uganda. Pray that Knox School of Theology may resume classes. / **PAUL & SARAH MOUR-REALE**, West Plains, MO. Pray for Covenant Reformed Church to spread the gospel throughout the Ozarks region.

8 **CALVIN & CONNIE KELLER**, Winston-Salem, NC. Pray for the Lord to raise up elders at Harvest OPC. / Tentmaking missionary **TINA DEJONG**, and missionary associates **JOANNA GROVE** and **ANGELA VOSKUIL**, Nakaale, Uganda.

9 Pray for missionary associates **DR. JIM & JENNY KNOX**, Mbale, Uganda, and assoc. missionary **LEAH HOPP**, Nakaale, Uganda, as they provide healthcare. / Home Missions associate general secretary **AL TRICARICO**.

10 **DAVID & RASHEL ROBBINS**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for a fruitful time of rest and reflection for the family during their furlough in the US. / **MATTHEW & LOIS COTTA**, Pasadena, CA. Pray that Pasadena Presbyterian would seize every opportunity for evangelism and genuine ecumenicity.



The McKinnons

11 Pray for **MARK (PEGGY) SUMPTER**, regional home missionary for the Presbytery of the Southwest. / Summer intern **EUGENE (KATHERINE) MCKINNON** at Christ OPC in Marietta, GA.

12 **MARK & CARLA VAN ESSENDELFT**, and assoc. missionaries **CHRISTOPHER & CHLOE VERDICK**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for the mission families as they begin a new year of homeschooling. / Office manager **ANNELISA STUDLEY**.

13 Associate missionaries **JAMES & ESTHER FOLKERTS**, Nakaale, Uganda. Pray for James as he takes up more pastoral duties. / Yearlong intern **SETH (EVA) DORMAN** at Limington OPC in Limington, ME.

14 **MICAH & EILEEN BICKFORD**, Farmington, ME. Pray that God would send five new families to Grace Reformed this year. / Stated clerk **HANK BELFIELD** and database administrator **CHARLENE TIPTON**.

15 **KEVIN & RACHEL MEDCALF**, Cumming, GA. Pray that Providence would continue to grow in holiness and gospel witness. / Yearlong intern **ISAAC (MASHA) BAUGH** at Covenant OPC at Kennewick, WA.

SEPTEMBER



The Lammés

16 **NICHOLAS & ROSEMARIE LAMMÉ**, Houston, TX. Praise God for Lammé's two years as an evangelist in Houston. / Assoc. missionaries **OCTAVIUS & MARIE DELFILS**, Haiti, give thanks for the ability to worship together again.

17 **GREGORY REYNOLDS**, editor of *Ordained Servant*. / Yearlong interns **BEN PETERSEN** at Covenant Presbyterian in Abilene, TX, and **SILAS (ANASTASIA) SCHREYACK** at Merrimack Valley Presbyterian in North Andover, MA.

18 Pray for **BEN & HEATHER HOPP**, Haiti, as the homeschooling year begins, and for the reopening of Haitian schools. / **MARK STUMPF**, OPC Loan Fund manager, and **JOHN FIKKERT**, director for the Committee on Ministerial Care.

19 Affiliated missionaries **DR. MARK & LAURA AMBROSE**, Cambodia. Pray for the healing of victims of trafficking. / **GREGORY & GINGER O'BRIEN**, Downingtown, PA. Pray for new members to be added to Christ Church.

20 **JAY & ANDREA BENNETT**, Neon, KY. Pray for evangelistic faithfulness and continued growth at Neon Reformed. / Please pray for the OPC trustees on the board of **GREAT COMMISSION PUBLICATIONS**.

21 Pray for **DAVID NAKHLA**, administrator of the Committee on Diaconal Ministries, as plans are made for the diaconal summit in 2021. / Yearlong intern **JOSEPH (ANNIE) POLLARD** at Calvin Presbyterian in Phoenix, AZ.

22 Affiliated missionaries **JERRY & MARILYN FARNIK**, Czech Republic. Praise God for the summer's outreach and VBS activities. / **BRAD & CINNAMON PEPP**, Dayton, OH. Pray that the Lord would enable campus ministries to resume.

23 **RON & CAROL BEABOUT**, Mifflintown, PA. Pray that the Holy Spirit would enable the flock at Grace and Truth to remain hopeful and steadfast. / **ANDREW MOODY** and **LINDA FOH**, technical assistants for OPC.org.

24 **MARK & JENI RICHLINE**, Montevideo, Uruguay. Pray that the Lord would raise up deacons to serve the church. / **BEN & MELANIE WESTERVELD**, Quebec, Canada. Pray for fruitful follow-up with on-line contacts this summer.

25 Pray for **RETIRED MISSIONARIES** Cal & Edie Cummings, Brian & Dorothy Wingard, Greet Rietkerk, and Young & Mary Lou Son. / **SHANE & RACHELLE BENNETT**, Grand Rapids, MI. Pray for Reformation OPC as it reassesses its outreach and evangelism efforts. / Home Missions general secretary **JOHN SHAW**.



Mark Bube

26 Pray for **CHRIS (NANCY) WALMER**, area home missions coordinator for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania. / Affiliated missionaries **CRAIG & REE COULBOURNE** (on furlough) and **LINDA KARNER**, Japan.

27 Pray for Foreign Missions general secretary **MARK BUBE** as he reports to the Committee this week. / Home Missions administrative assistant **KATHARINE OLINGER**.

28 **TYLER (NATALIE) DETRICK**, church-planting intern at First Street Reformed in Dayton, OH. / Pray for Foreign Missions admin. assistant **TIN LING LEE** and new secretary **STEPHANIE ZERBE** as they prepare for committee meetings.

29 **BILL WELZIEN**, Key West, FL. Praise God for his continued blessing on Keys Presbyterian Church. / **MELISA MCGINNIS**, controller, and **BOB JONES**, interim administrator for the Committee on Coordination.

30 Foreign Missions associate general secretary **DOUGLAS CLAWSON**, gives thanks for the ability to connect daily with our missionaries around the world. / **KERRI ANN CRUSE**, video and social media coordinator.

NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS

FIRELANDS GRACE OPC ORGANIZED IN SANDUSKY, OH

Larry B. Oldaker

Firelands Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church, a mission work of the Presbytery of Ohio, was organized as a new, separate congregation at a service of recognition, ordination, and installation on Friday, July 24, with Danny Olinger moderating. The presbytery had approved organization of Firelands Grace OPC at its stated March meeting, but the service had been postponed due to the pandemic.

Firelands Grace is a result of God's grace and faithfulness and born from a desire to see a solidly Reformed church in northern Ohio. It began as a Bible study in 2008, but its turning point was when God brought a group of younger families from a Oneness-Pentecostal background who had become convinced of biblical, Reformed theology. Rev. Larry Oldaker, who has led the group from its inception first as a regional home missionary, then as organizing pastor, was installed as the first pastor of Firelands Grace OPC. Cody Goff and Chris Vandergoot were ordained and installed as the congregation's first elders.

IN MEMORIAM: J. I. PACKER (1926-2020)

John R. Muether

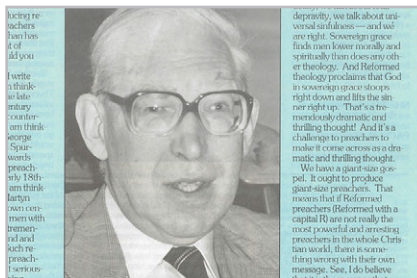
"Puritan Enthusiast" was the title of a March 1967 article in the *Presbyterian Guardian*. Written by Donald Poundstone, then a first-year MDiv student at Westminster Seminary, it introduced Orthodox Presbyterians to the Anglican theologian J. I. Packer, serving at the time as a guest lecturer at the seminary. Poundstone commended early works by Packer, including *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* and *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. Not yet established as a popular author, Packer humbly described himself as "the sort of bloke that dips into books."

Twenty-five years later, in a *New Horizons* survey of OP pastors, Packer's



Presbyters ordain and pray for new elders Cody Goff and Chris Vandergoot at the newly organized Firelands Grace OPC in Sandusky, OH

Knowing God was the title most commended as a "must read." After Dr. Packer passed away on July 17 at the age of ninety-three, there was an outpouring of thanksgiving for his life and ministry from the international Reformed world. It is fitting for Orthodox Presbyterians to join that chorus.



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Packer in *New Horizons* (1987) and the *Guardian* (1967)

UPDATE

CHURCHES

- On July 10, **Emmanuel Presbyterian** in Colville, WA, was organized as a particular congregation.
- On July 24, **Firelands Grace OPC** was organized as a particular congregation.

MINISTERS

- **Ryan D. Woods** was ordained as a minister and installed as pastor of Emmanuel Presbyterian in Colville, WA, on July 10.
- **Lawrence B. Oldaker**, previously the organizing pastor, was installed as pastor of Firelands Grace OPC in Sandusky, OH, on July 24.
- **William D. Dennison**, previously a teacher of the Word serving as a professor at Covenant College, was installed as pastor of Emmanuel OPC in Kent, Washington, on July 30.
- **Deryck Barson**, previously a PCA minister, was installed as pastor of Bethel Presbyterian in Wheaton, IL, on July 31.

REVIEWS

***Sophie and the Heidelberg Cat*, by Andrew Wilson. Crossway, 2019. Hardcover, 36 pages, \$10.39 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP member Celeste Jenkins.**

What is your only comfort in life and in death? The first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism is the basis of this whimsical picture book for three- to seven-year-olds. Although the book falls into the fiction category, the point of this story is to teach children the basics of grace.

The story opens with Sophie, a little girl who is feeling guilty about her behavior after her sister broke Sophie's toy.



The cat from the Heidelberg's house next door appears on Sophie's windowsill and invites her on a rooftop walk while they chat about the Bible. Sophie knows the Bible teaches "how we can please God, and be kind, and obey," but admits she fails pretty badly when it comes to accomplishing these things. The wise cat shares with Sophie that there is no one who can be good all the time. She explains that our hope isn't based on anything we do, but is a gift because of what Jesus *has done*, and goes on to paraphrase the Heidelberg Catechism's first question and answer. The cat finishes with an object lesson by showing her collar tag to Sophie, explaining that she does not belong to herself but to someone else. Likewise, Sophie belongs to Jesus, who loves and protects her. The story closes with the cat kindly giving her collar tag to Sophie as a reminder of their conversation. The cat's name tag reads, "Grace."

This book does a good job of reflecting relevant experiences children may have with their families, and the guilt with which a child may struggle. However, the flow of the text does not lend itself to a smooth read aloud. The story, written in verse, has inconsistent meter throughout, which may lead the readers

to trip their way through the book. And while the illustrations are sweet, many of the pages look quite similar to each other. This may make it challenging to keep a small child's attention. Despite these drawbacks, *Sophie and the Heidelberg Cat* could be used as a discussion starter to teach our little ones about the most important truths they can ever learn.

***Foundations of Covenant Theology*, video series, by Lane G. Tipton. Reformed Forum, 2019. Digital download from reformedforum.org, \$40.00. Reviewed by OP pastor C. Adam Ostella.**

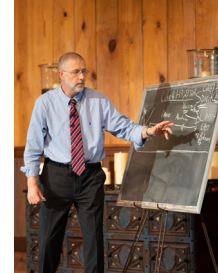
Insofar as the union of theological insight and religious devotion is a jewel, *Foundations of Covenant Theology* is a diamond. In this twelve-part video series taught by Rev. Dr. Lane G. Tipton and produced by Reformed Forum, Tipton reads Genesis 1–3 with other passages, drawing from them God's ultimate plan with respect to creation. He presents an eschatology of creation wherein the eternal Creator God has determined to make his glory uniquely visible in the realm of heaven, his temple dwelling place. God will bring into heaven his people, made in his image, who will worship him forever there, and he will do so by way of covenant. Formatted for adult Sunday school, each video is around thirty minutes in length and is accompanied by a PDF handout.

The foundations of covenant theology are theological, historical, and redemptive in character. The most basic foundation for covenant theology is God himself. As Tipton teaches us, Scripture roots covenant in the plan God has to bring glory to himself. A God-centered focus, that is, a theological rather than an anthropological or soteriological focus, is

evident throughout the series. Covenant theology is ultimately about the glory of God.

Tipton shows how Scripture roots covenant in God's creation of Adam in history. While Adam was created in the image of God in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, these qualities that Adam possessed before the Fall were designed to serve the higher end of fellowship and communion with God. This communion would consummate by means of the covenant of works. Adam was created to be oriented in the whole of his existence toward God and to demonstrate that orientation by obedience to God's Word. As God's glory dwells uniquely in heaven, the place of God's eternal rest, so Adam was from the beginning oriented toward the heavenly place. Entrance into the heavenly dwelling place of God was set before Adam as reward for his obedience on earth.

Tipton also shows how Scripture roots covenant in God's redemptive work of





COVENANT
Presbyterian Church

25th Anniversary

CELEBRATION

Saturday, October 10, 2020
Special Dinner at 5:00 pm

Sunday, October 11, 2020
Service at 9:30 am

Dinner and Sunday Service Location:
Kennewick Seventh Day Adventist Church
7105 West 10th Avenue, Kennewick, WA 99336

Please RSVP for the dinner by September 19th to John & Mary Deibler at 509-967-6762 or email covenantchurchtc@gmail.com



In Light of the COVID-19 outbreak our celebration may be postponed or cancelled. We will update those who have RSVP'd as the date approaches.
If you have a special memory, photos, or would like to send a special greeting we would love to include them in our celebration!

Please send them along with your RSVP to the email above.

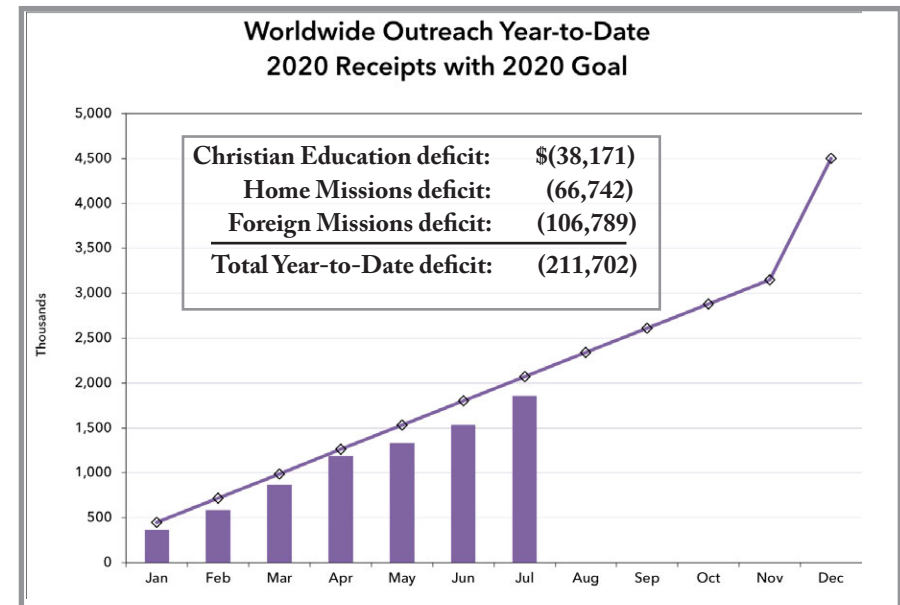
graciously bringing sinners to eternal life in heaven after Adam forfeited the offer through disobedience. He delves into Luke 4, highlighting how Jesus is the second and last Adam, the obedient Son of God. Through the obedience of Jesus Christ in his life, death, and resurrection, God brings his people to everlasting life in heaven.

Those interested in this delightful video series should note the title, *Foundations of Covenant Theology*. While suited for both corporate and personal Christian education, this series is not designed to be an exhaustive treatment of all covenants in Scripture. Rather, Tipton carefully charts the biblical and theological *foundations* for a proper understanding of covenant, and in doing so sets out an eschatology of creation. God himself and his creative activity are the ultimate foundations for covenant theology. God created a heavenly tabernacle of his glory and entering this place was the goal of all human activity from the very beginning, a goal to be attained by way of covenant obedience. This glory comes to its ultimate expression in Christ, who by obedience secured eternal life in heaven for all God's people. By a close reading of the absolute beginning, Tipton points us to the ultimate end: the glory of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Creator and Redeemer God!

***Compel Them to Come In: Calvinism and the Free Offer of the Gospel*, by Donald Macleod. Christian Focus, 2020. Hardcover, 160 pages, \$15.39 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP pastor Iain A. M. Wright.**

The title makes clear the intent and scope of the most recent publication from the pen of Donald Macleod. The catalyst is a sermon the author read that was preached by Charles Spurgeon in 1858. The sermon itself is a gem, made more astonishing by the fact that Spurgeon was only twenty-four years old when he preached it. Surely this is an encouragement in itself to young men at the beginning of their ministries.

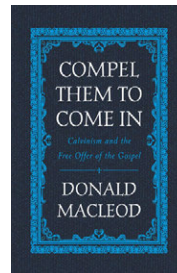
After introducing the subject matter, Macleod leads the reader through various challenges brought against the free offer of the gospel, dealing in succession with man's spiritual bondage, the doctrine of predestination, limited atonement, divine



sincerity, the deliverance of the free offer, knowing where the “fish” are, and finally the preacher himself. There is also added as an appendix to the work the sermon that Spurgeon preached.

This is no dry handling of theological controversies but a warmhearted and earnest encouragement for all who are charged to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to preach Christ boldly. It is worthy to be read by those just entering into ministry so that they might preach with earnestness to their hearers. It is worthy to be read by those whose feet have been upon the path of ministry a number of years and who may have grown weary or even discouraged. The chapters will blow upon the flickering flame of their endeavors and renew their confidence in the gospel message. It is worthy to be read by those whose preaching days are almost done, that they would not even on the remaining occasions left to them mount the pulpit steps only to lose sight of their high calling but to preach as a dying man to preach again.

This, then, is a brief book for preachers, though all believers would benefit from its pages. It might indeed prove beneficial in the hands of members of a pulpit com-



mittee that they might ask themselves what they are looking for in a preacher.

The book is written by one described as among the most prominent theologians of our generation. Macleod wears his learning lightly as he aims to stir not only the intellect but the heart. Sinclair Ferguson who surely is held to be no less in the company of the brightest stars in the Reformed firmament endorses this book as a “must read for preachers.” With such a recommendation, the reader needs no further commendation from me. Get a copy for your pastor today.

***The Song of Songs*, by G. I. Williamson. P&R, 2020. Paperback, 112 pages, \$7.50. Review by OP pastor W. Vernon Picknally Jr.**

G. I. Williamson is a retired minister in the OPC and has served churches in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. His study guides on the Shorter Catechism, the Confession of Faith, and the Heidelberg Catechism are well known. I hope that this wonderful book on the Song of Songs becomes just as well known as his study guides.

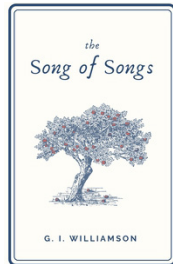
Many believers have never heard a sermon on the Song of Songs, let alone a series of sermons. Preachers have shied away from preaching on it because of the challenges of talking about sex and marriage. Williamson recalls telling a congregation during his early ministry

NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS *Continued*

that pastors shouldn't be afraid to preach on any part of the Word of God. Right away, someone said, "Okay, preach on the Song of Solomon." He did just that. This book is a series of eight sermons preached at the Silverstream congregation of the RCNZ.

Williamson takes the approach that the Song of Songs (or the Greatest of Songs) celebrates wedded romantic love and at the same time points us to the marriage of marriages (the greatest marriage)—the marriage of Christ to the church. Therefore this song can only really be sung by those who know Christ. He also points out that the genre of poetry (as opposed to historical narrative, etc.) is well suited to describe love. Williamson rightly states "we are living in a sex-saturated and sex dominated-culture." I fear that the neglect of this book of the Bible has given the impression that sex is somehow a bad or unholy thing. The Song of Songs shows us that sex, within its God-ordained bounds of marriage, is a precious gift of our Creator.

Since all Scripture is God-breathed and useful to equip us, we would all benefit greatly from studying this book of the Bible. Williamson's sermons are an immense help to that end. It has been said that the greatest compliment you can give a preacher is not to say, "that is a great sermon," but "that is a great passage of Scripture!" The preacher's goal should be to explain and apply the Word—not to draw attention to himself. I hope, after reading



these sermons, you will say, "What a great book of the Bible, and what a gracious God we have!"

***From Adam and Israel to the Church: A Biblical Theology of the People of God*, by Benjamin L. Gladd. IVP Academic, 2019. Paperback, 200 pages, \$17.59 (Amazon). Reviewed by OP pastor Jeffery A. Landis.**

Dr. Benjamin Gladd is an associate professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary. *From Adam and Israel to the Church* is the first volume in the new series *Essential Studies in Biblical Theology*. Gladd is the editor of the series and the author of this first volume. Gladd writes that this volume is an "attempt to produce an accessible, biblical theology on the people of God and the divine image" (2). He does so by tracing the image of God from the garden to eternity in the New Creation.

Gladd understands that being created in the image of God means that "Adam and Eve were called to represent God by functioning in the threefold office of king, priest, and prophet" (12). As image-bearers, we are called to emulate the three offices of our Lord. This threefold office is key to the structure of the book and is used to understand the calling of Adam, Israel, Jesus, and the church.

In addition to the threefold-offices theme, much time is spent on the threefold gradations of holiness seen throughout Scripture from the garden to Mount Sinai to the tabernacle/temple. This gradation is first seen in Genesis 1–2 in the

structure of the garden. The world apart from Eden corresponds to the outer court of the temple. The garden itself parallels the holy place in the temple. The most holy place, where God dwells, is understood by Gladd to be equivalent to Eden itself, where God dwelt with his creatures.

Another theme that Gladd develops relates to the role Genesis 1:28 plays in the world today. Gladd contends that the Lord's direction to Adam to fill the earth and exercise dominion is understood as still being the church's call today. We exercise this dominion, in part, as we bring the gospel to the world as representatives of Christ working in his power and authority. Through Christ and then his church, Satan is being subdued and the nations are being welcomed into the community of Christ.

Gladd succeeds in his desire to make this book accessible to the church. It is not a light read but one that most members of the congregation could understand and benefit from. This book is a positive presentation of good biblical theology. He does not make an effort to defend covenantal theology but presents it in its richness for the reader to appreciate. At the end of each chapter, a helpful summary and section on application are provided. Gladd provides many Scripture references and does a good job connecting passages, giving the reader helpful insights.

Dr. Gladd is to be commended for this first book in his series. This work is worth your time and attention. I look forward to future volumes that will explore other themes of biblical theology.

