

# Making Sense of the Covid-19 Coronavirus

*Andrew Basden.*

How do we make sense of Covid-19? Is God involved? What should we learn? What should we do?

There are many responses [See Note: Responses to Covid-19]. Some seek comfort and reassurance while others theorize. This article tries to draw a 'big picture' to help us place both kinds of response into a useful perspective. It is mainly for Christian readers (though others might also find parts useful), written from the perspective of a God who is active in the world and who loves the entire Creation [Note: Theological Basis], as revealed in the Bible. I do not believe God caused Covid-19, nor do I believe it is a punishment [Note: Causes of Covid-19]. But might Covid-19 have been allowed by God as a warning?

From both Christian and secular debates, it seems to me that there are six things to understand, each able to begin with 'R'.

- ◆ Realities that Covid-19 opens us up to;
- ◆ Responsibility: Covid-19 reminds us we are all responsible, some specially so;
- ◆ Representation: Covid-19 calls Christians to higher responsibility;
- ◆ Repentance: Covid-19 calls for a change in direction;
- ◆ Rewiring: Covid-19 calls Christians to lead towards the 'New Normal';
- ◆ Reassurance: Covid-19 and Christ.

The bulleted style encourages readers to think about each point and allows reading in any order.

## Realities that Covid-19 Opens Us Up To

- ◆ Up to now, climate disasters hit the poorer peoples more than the affluent, even though arguably caused by the affluent.
- ◆ Now, Covid-19 has hit the affluent peoples first -
  - » those who fly and travel more;
  - » those who spend more on entertainment, partying and eating-out;
  - » those who enjoy luxury goods;
  - » the affluent economies despite their superior technology and health systems.
- ◆ Indeed, Covid-19 seems to be actually saving lives in the less-affluent nations - by removing pollution from cities [Note: Saving lives].
- ◆ I find myself asking "Why has Covid-19 hit the affluent world, before the poorer world?" [Note: Covid-19 Figures]

- ◆ Is God at work, and if so, in what ways? Is God sending a warning to open up to reality?
- ◆ By stripping our lives of **non-essentials**, is God allowing Covid-19 to reveal that our affluent lifestyles and economies are bloated with (see [Note: Non-essentials]):
  - » Extravagance in travel, entertainment, socialising, 'hospitality', exotic food, gadgets, art ...? (30% of UK food is wasted.)
  - » Unnecessary business trips, lunches, meetings, insurance, reports, ...?
  - » Useless league tables, prestige, iconic projects, ...?
- ◆ Yet do not many of us aspire to, and expect, these things as 'normal'? Should we?
- ◆ The provision and consumption of these non-essentials is **harmful**. Affluent non-essentials result in climate change, injustice, cruelty to animals, air pollution, biodiversity loss, ... [Note: Harm from Affluence]
- ◆ *Most of the harm lands on those who did not cause it.*

### **Responsibility: Covid-19 Reminds Us We Are All Responsible, Some Specially So**

- ◆ *Genesis 1:26-28*. Has not God given all human beings the dignity of **general responsibility** for the rest of Creation? Responsibility for animals, for the poor, to creation, to develop its potential, ... [Note: Human Responsibility]
- ◆ *Revelation 11:18*. Because humanity, for the first time ever, is "destroying the earth" (due to our numbers, technology and economy) **climate and environmental responsibility** is especially important now (*kairos*). [Note: Climate and environmental responsibility]
- ◆ **Responsibility at all levels**: individuals, organisations, governments, society.
- ◆ **Extra responsibility** of three groups of people:
  - » The affluent have extra responsibility to use their wealth for healing Creation, rather than looking after themselves and their own.
  - » Leaders (politicians, business leaders, media, academics and others) have extra responsibility because they shape the mindsets of others and the structures of society.
  - » Those who represent God have special responsibility.

### **Representation: Covid-19 calls Christians to higher responsibility**

- ◆ Christians represent Jesus Christ among all peoples to demonstrate God's attitude and character of love, joy, peace

... (Galatians 5:22-23), and partner with God in saving the world. [Note: Representing God]

- ◆ *John 3:16*. "Those who believe" are to be the means by which God works full salvation in "the world". Note: "the world" - not just human beings, but also the non-human Creation and secular aspects of life [Note: Sacred-secular divide].
- ◆ Do not Christians in affluent nations tick all three boxes of extra responsibility? [Note: Amos]
- ◆ Are we fulfilling our responsibility? Two warnings:
  - » *Ezekiel 16:49*. Are we leading towards "affluence, arrogance, unconcern" for which God destroyed Sodom and exiled Judah? Even if inadvertently by enjoying or acquiescing to the affluent lifestyle?
  - » *Jeremiah 45*. God pulls down, not what humanity built, but what God built, uprooted what God planted: Israel and Judah. Because they misrepresented God, seeking their own prosperity and prestige. Might God, who "planted" Western Christianity over centuries, "uproot" it for similar reasons? [Note: Jeremiah 45]
- ◆ Covid-19 seems like a disaster to our bloated economies. But might it be a warning to affluent peoples, including Christians?

## **Repentance: Covid-19 Calls for a Change in Direction**

- ◆ Is Covid-19 a warning by God that we need to repent? One of a sequence of warnings over the past few decades?
  - » Repentance is not just remorse, e.g. for past mistakes. Repentance is change of heart that affects future actions.
  - » Repentance is acknowledging we were wrong, turning away from idolatry, pride and self-centredness, and the injustices they generate. It is a challenge, yet brings the deep relief that we crave.
- ◆ Repentance is needed at all levels: individuals, business, governments, media and society.
- ◆ Repentance is needed over:
  - » Expectations of unlimited ease and enjoyment;
  - » Aspirations for unlimited pleasures and conveniences;
  - » Presuppositions of what we deem important;
  - » Idols, to or for which we sacrifice other things (e.g. environment), often without thinking;
  - » Sacred cows like economic growth and GDP [Note: GDP];
  - » Self-justification and self-centredness.

- ◆ Repentance means not “returning to normal.” Our “old normal” was harmful and even evil. The ‘**New Normal**’ must be deeply different from the old, a healthier, more responsible lifestyle. [Note: New Normal]

## **Rewiring: Covid-19 calls Christians to lead towards the ‘New Normal’**

- ◆ Repentance calls for rewiring, not just reprogramming (computer metaphor).
- ◆ In society, reprogramming is changing plans or policies, rewiring is changing aspirations, expectations and presuppositions - deeper, longer-lasting.
- ◆ Has not Covid-19 reminded us that:
  - » Local walks are enjoyable and inexpensive?
  - » Nature is wonderful?
  - » We don’t need to drive or fly so much?
  - » Family life is worth working at, instead of escaping to parties?
  - » People are generous in a way that was often suppressed before?
- ◆ Has Covid-19 revealed what could be dispensed with, or at least reduced, in the New Normal?
- ◆ Rewiring is change of what the Bible calls “heart”.
- ◆ Rewiring is a challenge. How do we rewire?
- ◆ One effective way of rewiring society is the **Gospel of Christ**.
 

Look at its track record over 2000 years: “These men have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6), Francis of Assisi, the Reformation, the Puritans, abolishing the slave trade, the UK Factory Acts, the RSPCA, various revivals. [Note: Track Record of Gospel]
- ◆ This is because the Gospel has three dimensions: we become acceptable with God (Christ’s atonement), we experience God here and now (the Holy Spirit), so that through us God brings salvation to the whole Creation (Romans 8). [Note: Three Dimensions of Salvation]
- ◆ Whilst human activity (Government action, Extinction Rebellion, etc.) has some value, “Lasting change is impossible without the Holy Spirit.”
- ◆ **God’s people** have the secret of rewiring.
- ◆ Has God presented Christians in affluent, influential nations with an **opportunity to lead** towards a New Normal that is more responsible to God’s entire Creation? [Note: Tearfund]
- ◆ We need discussion on how to take this lead in politics. In

my experience, posing challenging questions is effective - at three levels:

- » *Society*. Our questioning can expose idolatrous and selfish aspirations and unjust expectations - especially the impact of lifestyle on Creation.
- » *Government*. We can question how proposed policy changes will lead to a more responsible New Normal rather than revert to the old. Should harmful, non-essential parts of our old economies be reduced? [Note: Restoring the Economy]
- » *Individuals and Businesses*. Our questioning can help people develop their aspirations for a good, more responsible New Normal.

Only 9% of Britons want to return to the old normal  
[Note: Yearning for Something Better].

- ◆ To lead in rewiring is not an imposition but a privilege and challenge. God offers Reassurance through Christ.

### **Reassurance: Covid-19 and Christ**

- ◆ The **love of God** is for all Creation, not just us. Many disasters open up good possibilities that we did not (would not?) reach before.
- ◆ In that, I find **reassurance**.
- ◆ Are we afraid, as human beings, of Covid-19, its effect on us and our economies?
- ◆ Are we afraid, as God's representatives, of taking bold, unusual action to repent and rewire - of ridicule, rejection, persecution?

Is not the *Imago Dei* in humanity on our side? Has not Covid-19 shown that many people rise to the challenge when they face responsibility? [Note: Yearning for Something Better] Cannot the Holy Spirit use this?

- ◆ Jesus asked his disciples "Why are you so afraid?" (Mark 4:40). Do we not have reassurance of God's protection, provision, pardon all in God's long-term plan, in which "Jesus wins"? [Note: Protection]
- ◆ We will again say "He did all things well!"
- ◆ Will we take the opportunity God offers us to work with him to leading the world in repenting and rewiring towards a more responsible New Normal? [Note: Working With God]

-----

### **Notes and Further Reading**

**Note. Responses to Covid-19**

Some responses are:

"I'm scared!" - There is much in our lives that Covid-19 knocked away or knocked off balance. Jonathan Tame's article 'Coming to terms with Covid-19' ("[http://evangelicalfocus.com/blogs/5194/Coming\\_to\\_terms\\_with\\_Covid\\_19](http://evangelicalfocus.com/blogs/5194/Coming_to_terms_with_Covid_19)") sets out many of these very well. "Let's focus on preventing, curing or caring" is the very understandable response of the health and care sectors, and of those affected directly by the illness.

"It brings out the best in people" is conveyed by the many snippets I have heard on the radio or through Youtube of what people have done, some self-sacrificing and some creative or fun. Many are helping each other. Every Thursday, people stand in their doorways and applaud the health workers. I have noticed that many more people are walking around our locality than ever before. Wonderful! And yet - how long will that last, and how can we ensure it does last? Even though the media like to portray heart-warming examples of the best, what about the worst? This article briefly suggests how this might occur.

Those are 'local' responses, of people within, and coping with, each situation. The remaining responses are ones that abstract away from the details, seeing the proverbial forest rather than individual trees. Such are the responses with which this article is mainly concerned.

"Get the economy back to normal" is Donald Trump's attitude, and that of some other politicians - but should we do so? What is normal and why should the old normal be preserved? Are there not parts of the economy that do not deserve to be rebuilt? This article suggests one basis on which the New Normal might be debated.

"It was prophesied" - but the prophets do not usually say what to do about it. One kept on saying "We must pray. We must pray! ..." and got a round of applause for doing so - but gave no indication of what to pray. This article tries to think about God's Plan in more detail.

"It's the fourth horseman of the Apocalypse." - But surely there have been even worse plagues in the past.

"It's a punishment" - but for what? Some Christians too easily say it is for evils they see in secular society. This article shows that if there is punishment, it is for something much deeper, and it might especially fall on affluent Christians - on 'us' not 'them'.

"Don't try to understand, just lament" (N.T. Wright "<https://time.com/5808495/coronavirus-christianity/>"). - But this makes God distant and inscrutable, it makes hope too vague, and it robs us of incentive to repent and change. This article tries to put lamenting in context.

"God is mending the world" (Justin Brierley) - But how, and in what way, and what is our part in that? This article tries to show how.

## **Note. A Theological Basis**

The ideas here are outworkings of 'A New View in Theology and Practice' "<http://abxn.org/nv/>" as it is in 2020. It is being worked out from my background as Evangelical, Anglican, Scottish Presbyterian, Baptist, Missionary, Holiness, Charismatic, Calvinistic, Arminian, and perhaps a bit of Celtic. See "<http://abxn.org/spiritual.journey.html>".

## **Note. Causes of Covid-19**

I believe that God gave to the whole Creation the dignity of responsiveness rather than being merely predetermined clockwork. Creation is responsive in different ways to different kinds of law in all its varied aspects. For example, the Covid-19 virus, animals and the human body respond to laws of the physical and biotic aspects, and it is within these aspects that they interact. Animals and humans also respond to laws of the psychical aspect. Humans respond to laws of the lingual, social, juridical, moral and other aspects, and it is these kinds of law that

enable us to communicate, to socialise and be just or unjust, self-giving or selfish. So it was the interaction between humans, animals and the Covid-19 virus within the physical and biotic spheres that led to its jumping species to us. See also Responsibility below; causality with freedom implies responsibility. (For one useful understanding of these aspects, see "<http://dooy.info/aspects.html>".)

God allows Creation, including humans, to function, and when humans cause harm, God laments - and eventually at the right time sacrificed Himself and at another right time will renew Creation. The only way we can say that God 'caused' the Covid-19 pandemic is that God is the Origin of the laws within which humans misused animals so that the Covid-19 virus jumped to us. (Has not God already 'taken the rap' for all harm we have caused?)

(But what about what we call miracles? God sometimes might 'step in' but the various kinds of laws with which God has gifted Creation are so well-designed that this is the exception rather than the rule. Are not God's activity and character better seen via how Creation works without 'miracles' (Romans 1:20)? See also *What Are Miracles?*, "<http://abxn.org/nv/miracles.html>".)

### **Note. Covid-19 Saves Lives ?**

News has just emerged that it may be that Covid-19 might in fact be saving lives. By vastly reducing traffic, air pollution has plummeted, and many people are likely to live that would otherwise have died. The numbers are interesting. "Two months of pollution reduction "likely has saved the lives of 4,000 kids under 5 and 73,000 adults over 70 in China," he said." March 17, 2020 - while deaths from Covid-19 in China of people of all ages were only 3231 on that date.

See "<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/03/17/coronavirus-could-be-saving-lives-pollution-carbon-emissions/5066718002/>"

### **Note. Covid-19 Figures**

At the time of writing, it seems that by far most of the cases of Covid-19, and most of the deaths, have occurred in China, Europe and North America, with relatively few in Africa. For example, the WHO Situation Report for 16 April 2020 shows figures confirmed cases/deaths in China, Spain, UK and USA as 83797/3352, 177633/18579, 98480/12868 and 604070/25871, but only 2506/34 for South Africa and only 373/11 for the vast nation of Nigeria. The figures have been of this kind throughout the pandemic so far. Of course the basis for reporting differs by nation, but to me these figures show that Covid-19 has hit the affluent world far more than the Two-thirds world. What will happen if Covid-19 hits Africa as it has Europe and the USA, with much weaker health systems? I just pray God's protection on Africa. For the latest figures, see "<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>".

### **Note. Non-essentials**

How much of our lifestyles is the non-essentials? It is difficult to find any figures for how much of our transport or goods are really necessary and which are non-essential. However, Covid-19 has forced one figure to emerge. On 8 April 2020, the UK Road Haulage Association reported that 46% of the UK truck fleet was parked up because nobody was purchasing "non-essentials" (the word they used). So nearly half the goods transported are "non-essential"! If so, could the transport sector halve its carbon footprint if we no longer demanded non-essentials? Of course, it is not as simple as that - but it does oblige us to find better figures and take action.

However, some Christians (and others) dislike such a message. A couple of people reacted to a draft with: But does not God want us to enjoy ourselves? What about music? What about enjoyable food from developing nations - does it not provide an income for those who grow it? We were really blessed when we flew abroad. Is not God extravagant in providing for us and blessing us?

These questions have challenged me all my life alongside the notion of responsibility, and a full answer cannot be found here. Yes, God supports "non essential" delight - indeed, God wants the entire Creation, human and non-human,

to “sing” and “clap”. Yes, even plants like trees or vegetables; CS Lewis expressed it as “the kind of joy a vegetable can have”.

Yet, is there not something deeply evil when we the affluent demand, expect and justify increasing amounts of pleasure, comfort or convenience for ourselves when the provision of them harms others? Exotic foods grown in Kenya for example rob local people of land to grow their own food. Is it right to import (demand, expect) tropical fruits (oranges are 90% water) from lands without enough water for their own people? Does not this transfer water in the wrong direction? Is it right to fly to developing nations and stay there when (a) flying disproportionately serves the wealthy (only 20% of the world’s population have ever flown) and contributes disproportionately to climate change emissions, (b) our expectation of certain levels of comfort, water-availability, food, etc. puts unseen pressures on local resources? Christian development agencies like TearFund have recognised these realities for years; are our donations to them doing much more than merely undoing the damage that we ourselves do?

There is no easy answer to those those questions. I don’t want to ban pleasures. But do the questions above not disguise a self-centredness that is not of Christ? Whatever level of affluence we enjoy, do we not think it is ‘ok’ and only those richer than us are extravagant? Should we not “take heed to ourselves”, questioning our assumptions, expectations, aspirations and ‘demands’? Maybe we can get just as much joy out of life by simple, local things, especially the natural world? They say “Travel broadens the mind” - but does it not also narrow the mind, like a telescope offers a narrow view of distant things so we don’t see what’s near?

Link: “[thegenerosityproject.com](http://thegenerosityproject.com)”.

### **Note. The Harm of Affluence**

Affluence is often seen as good, and something to aim at. Though it might seem to reduce some poverty, it causes much harm of many kinds. See [“http://abxn.org/ccge/affluence.harm.html”](http://abxn.org/ccge/affluence.harm.html).

### **Note. Human Responsibility: ‘Radah’**

God gave human beings the responsibility to “rule over” (Hebrew *radah*, Genesis 1:26-28). As argued in [“http://abxn.org/radah.html”](http://abxn.org/radah.html), this is not the arrogant lordship of consumption but imaging God’s love towards all Creation, as its shepherds ([“http://abxn.org/nv/shepherds.html”](http://abxn.org/nv/shepherds.html)). It is not a pleasure-seeking privilege but a joyful, loving responsibility.

This is especially true of our responsibility to the animal kingdom. Most of the following material comes from Dr. Philip Sampson, to whom many thanks. See Philip’s book, *Animal Ethics and the Nonconformist Conscience*, for more.

It might be no accident that, in Genesis 1, mammals and humans were created on the same ‘day’, strongly suggesting kinship rather than superiority. Thomas Ken’s ancient doxology “Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise him all creatures here below” expresses a Biblical theme that all animals, and indeed all Creation, form a choir of cosmic praise to the Creator, with humans as leading that song (e.g. Psalms 104, 148). Do we usually leave this insight with the hymn sheet in the pew? Not only do we go home and eat the choir, but we pay an industry to provide animal flesh, knowing that it routinely entails the physical and sexual abuse animals, to serve what Paul calls the ‘belly god’.

C.H. Spurgeon was very outspoken about those who claim to be Christians but who are cruel to animals. Does not Proverbs 12:10 tell us that animal cruelty is wickedness? Leviticus 18 tells us the bestiality is wrong. Around two-thirds of novel viruses originated in animal populations and were transmitted to humans as a result of the cruel way we exploit God’s creatures. If it turns out, as is likely, that Covid-19 originated in this way, then it poses serious questions about how we treat animals. This is in addition to the fact that animal farming, with its travel and other processes, is the largest source of greenhouse gases.

Humans have responsibility to be good shepherds of the animal kingdom. It was, as one nonconformist put it, “sin which taught the master to eat the servant”, and heinous evil has extended this to widespread, non-essential gluttony.

This responsibility extends from individual choices about eating to national decisions about animal welfare.

Scripture refers to the restoration of animal-human relationships. The gospel is good news for animals. Historically, when Christians have turned to the Bible, animals have benefited, both individually and legislatively. Jesus shows us what this looks like. From the outset of His ministry to His entry into Jerusalem, Jesus sets us an example of how we should treat animals. Should not Christians represent Jesus properly in this matter? If we changed our treatment of animals to facilitate their disclosure and worship of God, many environmental issues would be alleviated.

### **Note. Climate and Environmental Responsibility**

Why do I focus on climate and environmental responsibility and not, for example, poverty? Because of the times we are in. We are in unique times, when humanity, through its technology and economy, multiplied by 7 billion, is changing the planet and damaging the ecosystem as never before. Whilst asteroids might have done this before (according to some theories), humans have a responsibility that asteroids do not - a responsibility to image God to the rest of Creation. See Page on Radah, "<http://abxn.org/radah.html>".

I wonder whether "affluence, arrogance and unconcern", the reasons for which Judah was taken away (Ezekiel 16:49), are the main causes of the current climate and environmental crisis. Rather than imaging God to the rest of Creation, have we not destroyed it or at least acquiesced in that destruction because of our aspirations for comforts and conveniences of affluent life?

To be frank, I believe that those Christians who deny or seek to downplay our climate and environmental responsibility are dishonouring Christ and working against what God is doing today. It saddens me. See "<http://abxn.org/ccge/>".

### **Note. Representing God**

Throughout the Bible we find the theme of representing God.

- » Human beings represent God to the rest of Creation.
- » The people of Israel represented God as a distinct nation among nations.
- » The prophets represent God to God's people (to remind and chide and encourage to God's ways and understanding).
- » Jesus Christ was God representing Godself within the Creation.
- » Those who follow Jesus (Christians) represent God among and to all peoples.

(I'm not here going to get into the status and role of the Jews and the modern nation of Israel today in God's Plan. I happen to greatly respect the Jews and take Romans 9-11 seriously; see "<http://abxn.org/nv/romans9-11.html>".)

"Representing God" involves (a) demonstrating and conveying God's character, (b) allowing God to work through us, (c) so that others might experience something of God and be drawn to God and live as God intended. See "<http://abxn.org/nv/representation.html>".

Those who represent God have capabilities or characteristics that enable them to fulfil responsibilities:

- ◆ Human beings are responsible as "*Imago Dei*" to 'shepherd' the rest of Creation so that it experiences God, its Creator, more fully. God gives human beings 'rule' over the rest of Creation in order to fulfil that responsibility. Genesis 1:25-26 ("<http://abxn.org/nv/shepherds.html>").
- ◆ The people of Israel were (are?) responsible for showing and enacting God's way of life as a nation, rather than merely seeking its own prosperity and glory. God gave Israel laws and protection in order to fulfil this responsibility.
- ◆ Prophets are responsible to ensure they give God's message, not their own

prejudices. God's Spirit comes upon prophets so they fulfil that responsibility.

- ◆ Jesus Christ was responsible for correcting misunderstandings of God, showing the character of God fully in a way humans could best understand, and opening the way to God's intended full salvation - for instance as in Romans 8 ("<http://abxn.org/nv/romans8.html>"). Jesus was both fully divine and fully human and thus fulfilled and fulfils that responsibility.
- ◆ Christians are responsible as to demonstrate God's attitude and lifestyle of love, joy, peace ... (Galatians 5:22-23), to invite all peoples into God's Kingdom and be the means by which God brings full salvation to "the world" (John 3:16). God gives forgiveness to, and indwells, those who truly follow Christ, in order to fulfil that responsibility. "We have the mind of Christ" (I Corinthians 2:16).

### **Note. Sacred-secular Divide**

I wonder if the idea of representing God might help us overcome the sacred-secular divide - the mindset in both Christians and secular people to tend to see each other as rather irrelevant or worse). The idea of representation God allows us to see a positive rather than negative place in God's Plan for the whole of humanity as well as for Christians (and for Jews) - the same kind of place. None is excluded, but how each is included in God's Plan is different.

(This is not universal salvation; the Bible clearly shows that some go to perdition - but it is the proud, arrogant, unconcerned who do so. See the difference in attitude between those on the king's right and left (sheep, goats) in Jesus' parable. Salvation is probably much wider than most evangelicals presume.)

### **Note. Amos and the Difference in Responsibility**

See the opening of Amos, to find this difference. It contains seven "woes" in judgement on various nations. The first five are the surrounding nations, and God criticises them for what we might today call war crimes. The last two are Judah and Israel, and God criticises them differently, for ignoring God's law and for worshipping idols. But surely the surrounding nations worshipped idols, so why did not God criticise them for that too? Why only Israel and Judah? Because Israel and Judah were meant to be God's people, God's representatives, showing what the Living God is like and what life subject to the Living God should be like - but they refused to do so.

### **Note. Jeremiah 45**

The short chapter, Jeremiah 45, contains the striking statements, that God is pulling down what God built up, uprooting what God had planted, and bringing destruction on the entire world. At first I was shocked. If God uproots what God planted, then is it not God's admission of failure? There must be something more beyond this. I tackled the difficulty and reached a summit, from which I could perhaps see farther. It was part of God's response to the people of Judah refusing their role of representing God as a nation among nations; they would be removed - though later they would be restored - and God would represent Himself in Jesus Christ, opening up a new era in which all peoples would benefit from knowing the Living God.

I wondered: Might something similar happen to God's second people, Christians as a whole? Then I realised that God had built up Western Christianity to be a beacon in the world, but we had refused to represent God aright, especially in the major issue of climate and environmental responsibility. So might God be pulling down Western Christianity? Recent events, like 9/11, economic crises and now Covid-19, could perhaps indicate this. See "<http://abxn.org/discussion/jeremiah45.html>".

### **Note. GDP and Economic Growth**

GDP, Gross Domestic Product, is seen as the ultimate measure of 'the economy', and all governments and businesses want it to keep growing. But GDP is a bad, false measure of real prosperity or, a popular phrase these days, "human flourishing". Nor does economic growth ensure real flourishing.

GDP increases when we break or throw away things and buy new rather than repair or recycle. It increases with crime, because we employ more police, prisons and pay and receive more insurance. Yet Government policy is strongly influenced by what will increase GDP ("benefit the economy").

GDP was not mandated by God, but by narrow human rationality. Nor was it mandated by God that 'the economy' must always grow. Has Covid-19 shown this? Do Jesus' words "You cannot serve God and Mammon" apply here? According to Bob Goudzwaard ('Idols of Our Time', IVP) economic growth is an idol. Should not those who follow Christ turn society away from this idol? Economic growth is not necessary for human flourishing.

To see how this might alter our understanding of GDP see 'Moving the Global Economy Towards a New Normal' ("[https://youtu.be/X\\_YOfEGMrNA](https://youtu.be/X_YOfEGMrNA)").

To read up on this try, e.g. T. Jackson (2009), 'Prosperity Without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet', London: Earthscan.

### **Note. The New Normal**

There needs to be debate in society about what the New Normal should be like. Nor just debate about what the New Normal *can* be or *might* be, but about what it *should* be. What future should we, as people, politicians and pundits, aim for and aspire to?

Do we not need to avoid going back to the full panoply of harmful extravagance that characterized the affluent lifestyle? At least to some extent? Covid-19 has revealed that people, including Christians, have shown (a) some awareness that things before were "non-essential" and even harmful, (b) some willingness to find good in the simple things of life including the natural world. Is that not fertile soil for debate about what the New Normal should look like?

Debate must involve everyone and will take some time, so we need to begin it very soon. Yet our politicians and opinion formers are not seriously leading on this. Is this an opportunity for God's people to take a godly, loving, humble and bold and challenging lead?

It seems to me the following things need to be debated:

- ◆ Which sectors of our lifestyle or the economy should we (government or society) revivify, and which not?
- ◆ How do we lessen the impact job loss etc. in the sectors that should shrink?
- ◆ How do we as a society achieve this? For instance, against powerful interests of the old normal?

I believe that Christians who are fully dedicated to Christ have an opportunity and responsibility, with reassurance, to help society think this through. We are called to work towards the harmony of Creation is God's Plan in Christ, which includes what happens here on this earth as well as in the New Earth. It includes especially climate and environmental responsibility.

### **Note. The Track Record of the Gospel of Christ**

For a start, read Tom Holland's *Dominion*, in which a non-believer charts the history of Christianity, warts and all, where the 'all' includes recognition of much good. He argues that Christianity, far from being a curse to the world, has been a great blessing, and things like care for the poor and self-giving love come from the Gospel of Christ rather than from ancient Greece. See "<https://youtu.be/AIJ9gK47Ogw>" for a short piece of an interview with N.T. Wright, "[https://youtu.be/nlf\\_ULB26cU](https://youtu.be/nlf_ULB26cU)" for the full interview, and his 2019 book, *Dominion*, for a full account.

### **Note. Three Dimensions of Salvation**

The full Gospel of Christ has three dimensions, not just one (See ["http://abxn.org/nv/3ds.html"](http://abxn.org/nv/3ds.html); ["http://abxn.org/nv/romans8.html"](http://abxn.org/nv/romans8.html)):

- ◆ Dimension 1: people's justification before God through the atoning death of Christ (Romans 8:1) - but more ...
- ◆ Dimension 2: a here-and-now dynamic relationship with God, involving sanctification and Holy-Spirit power (Romans 8:14) - but more ...
- ◆ Dimension 3: both of those leading to God's mature people representing God (see below) to the rest of Creation in the way God originally intended in Genesis 1 (Romans 8:19-21).

"Rest of Creation" includes (a) the non-human world of 'nature', (b) other humans, especially the poor, (c) secular areas of life, such as economics and academia.

*That* is what enables rewiring of society -

people who know peace with God, who have let the Holy Spirit dwell with in every part of their lives, growing love, joy, peace, patience ... (Galatians 5:22-23), who then have their Heavenly Father's attitude of proactive love towards all Creation.

It is Dimension 3 that leads to rewiring, but rewiring will be unsustainable without Dimensions 1 and 2.

Human attempts to rewire, without the three dimensions, e.g. by Extinction Rebellion, might not be sustainable over the longer term. Yet they are not to be condemned nor wasted; It is the Spirit of God who implants desires for this, and we need to work with them as God leads.

Rewiring must involve action at individual and societal levels:

- ◆ evangelism,
- ◆ healing the hurts of the world through the power and compassion of Christ,
- ◆ working to change political structures,
- ◆ working to change attitudes (e.g. via the media),
- ◆ working to change presuppositions, aspirations, expectations, and beliefs (e.g. via academic research in the sciences, via art).

Of these:

- ◆ Has evangelism fallen out of fashion among Christians?
- ◆ Is healing the world where there is currently most Christian activity?
- ◆ Working to change political structures has been the focus of some Christian groups for decades, but have they been as effective as they could be?
- ◆ Working to change attitudes via the media has hardly begun.
- ◆ Working to change presuppositions etc. via academic research and art has hardly begun, though there are a few groups trying to do so, such as Christian Academic Network and European Leadership Forum, Transforming the Mind, and Transforming Work.

### **Note. Tearfund's Campaign**

TearFund has produced a good booklet and study guide on 'Rebooting':

["https://www.tearfund.org/en/about\\_you/action/the\\_world\\_rebooted/"](https://www.tearfund.org/en/about_you/action/the_world_rebooted/).

### **Note. Restoring the Economy**

Nations must restore their economies after Covid-19 has been brought under control. I am not discussing when that should happen. Rather, I ask: which sectors of the economy should be restored? Should we regrow the harmful parts of our economies? See ["https://youtu.be/X\\_Y0fEGMrNA"](https://youtu.be/X_Y0fEGMrNA) e.g. aviation, tourism, exotic foods, gambling?

There needs to be debate about this. Do not God's people have a responsibility and opportunity to lead in that debate?

### **Note. Yearning for Something Better**

Only 9% of Britons want to return to the 'old normal'.  
"<https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-only-9-of-britons-want-life-to-return-to-normal-once-lockdown-is-over-11974459>".

This yearning for something better than we had before, this feeling deep in our hearts knowing that what we had was wrong and unhealthy - might it be an appearing of the *Imago Dei* in humans? A remnant of the fundamental God that God built into the fabric of Reality, on which we and the Holy Spirit can capitalise?

### **Note. Protection**

Psalm 91 says "he will save you from the ... deadly pestilence". This has been taken as a promise to individuals of God's protection - to him/her "who dwells in the shelter of the Most High". So some members of the more extreme Christian groups have flouted Covid-19 lockdown. For example, Patient 31 in South Korea, who attended close-packed worship services of a quasi-Christian sect while in a fever (though according to Bloomberg's detailed analysis she was first told by a hospital that she did not have Covid-19). Nevertheless, does not dishonour come to the Name of Christ by those who do do?

I believe that God does protect individuals. Such protection is not automatic, not a mechanical law, and God does sometimes allow the 'elect' to 'suffer' (often in ways that even the sufferer recognises are a blessing). That is a complex issue, which includes our mis-perceptions of what is 'suffering', and is not discussed here. What is more important here is protecting others - from infection by me and from my setting a bad example. We are called to "look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4). 'Food offered to idols' comes to mind. In that attitude, I should lockdown etc. for the sake of others. And rejoice humbly in the bigger picture, such as this article has tried to paint.

### **Note. Working With God**

If Jesus thought it right to enter the world and live his life without many non-essentials (even without a home at one point!), then does God call us who represent Him to take this seriously at this *kairos* in history when our non-essentials are destroying the earth?

Will we engage with Christ in taking a lead, or will we return to the our beloved harmful non-essentials? Let us go ahead in trust, humility and courageous obedience, working to take God's warnings seriously. Let God's people in academia, politics, media and management foster and lead society's debate and action about exit strategies and what the New Normal should look like. A few ideas have been given above for political action. There is also action through the media.

And here are some ideas on how to pray about the Covid-19 pandemic - including as we emerge from lockdown. Two sets of ten points.

CARE sent round "Ten Ways to Pray About Coronavirus", which are summarised as:

- ◆ "Intercede for God's mercy"
- ◆ "Give thanks for those caring for vulnerable people"
- ◆ "Ask God to grant success to medical researchers"
- ◆ "Pray for our churches"
- ◆ "Pray for those in badly affected places"
- ◆ "Pray for the NHS"
- ◆ "Ask God to watch over those in need of rescue and support"
- ◆ "Call on God to pour out his Spirit upon his people"
- ◆ "Pray about the economic effects"
- ◆ "Intercede for leaders around the world."

Most of them respond to the problems we face within the situation, as sufferers of Covid-19. On reading those, I felt something was missing, and was challenged to ask myself, what else would I pray? So I began to put down some notes of what else I might pray, and the following ten points flowed out quickly, without much struggle (which, in my life is often a sign of something being 'right'). The list below is different, being about the bigger, longer-term picture, and how to move forward to the 'New Normal'.

- ◆ Thank God for the good that still lies in human beings, and that it has been revealed by the pandemic.
- ◆ Thank God especially for the NHS workers who are sacrificing themselves for us all and ask that God's blessing will come upon them.
- ◆ Intercede for God's mercy on and protection of Africa and the Two-thirds World that lack the huge resources in their health systems that are in the affluent nations.
- ◆ Plead with God to open the eyes of our leaders to the reality of the damage we have been doing in and to the world.
- ◆ Thank God for his mercy in sending messages to warn us to open up to reality and repent.
- ◆ Intercede for the people of God to wake up to our role as representing God among the peoples, and the responsibility that goes along with this: a responsibility to not live for ourselves or our comfort, but for Him who dies for us and rose again.
- ◆ Plead that God's people will see their own need of repentance - lack of deep discipleship, for living for ourselves more than representing God among the people.
- ◆ Plead for a spirit of repentance among the affluent peoples of the world and their leaders (as occurred in Nineveh), turning away from our previous idol of affluence.
- ◆ Ask God to move his people to take a lead in the repentance, rethinking and rewiring that is needed in the world.

Maybe we can pray from the two lists together.  
(See "<http://abxn.org/covid19.praying.html>".)

-----  
Created: 10 June 2020 by Andrew Basden from an initial version "<http://abxn.org/covid19-init.html>", which was developed 9 April - 24 May 2020 with help from Maurice Manktelow, Paulo Ribeiro, Andy Sawyer, Sue Halliday, Judith Basden, Phil Sampson, all of whom provided valuable comments, some of which forced me to think hard. In the initial version, the sections 'Responsibility' and 'Representation' are later, but, when preparing a shorter version for Christians in Politics, it seemed they belong earlier. Most of the text of this version is from that for Christians in Politics, with most of the notes from the initial version.

Last updated: 29 July 2020 slight changes to intro; added section on causes of Covid-19.