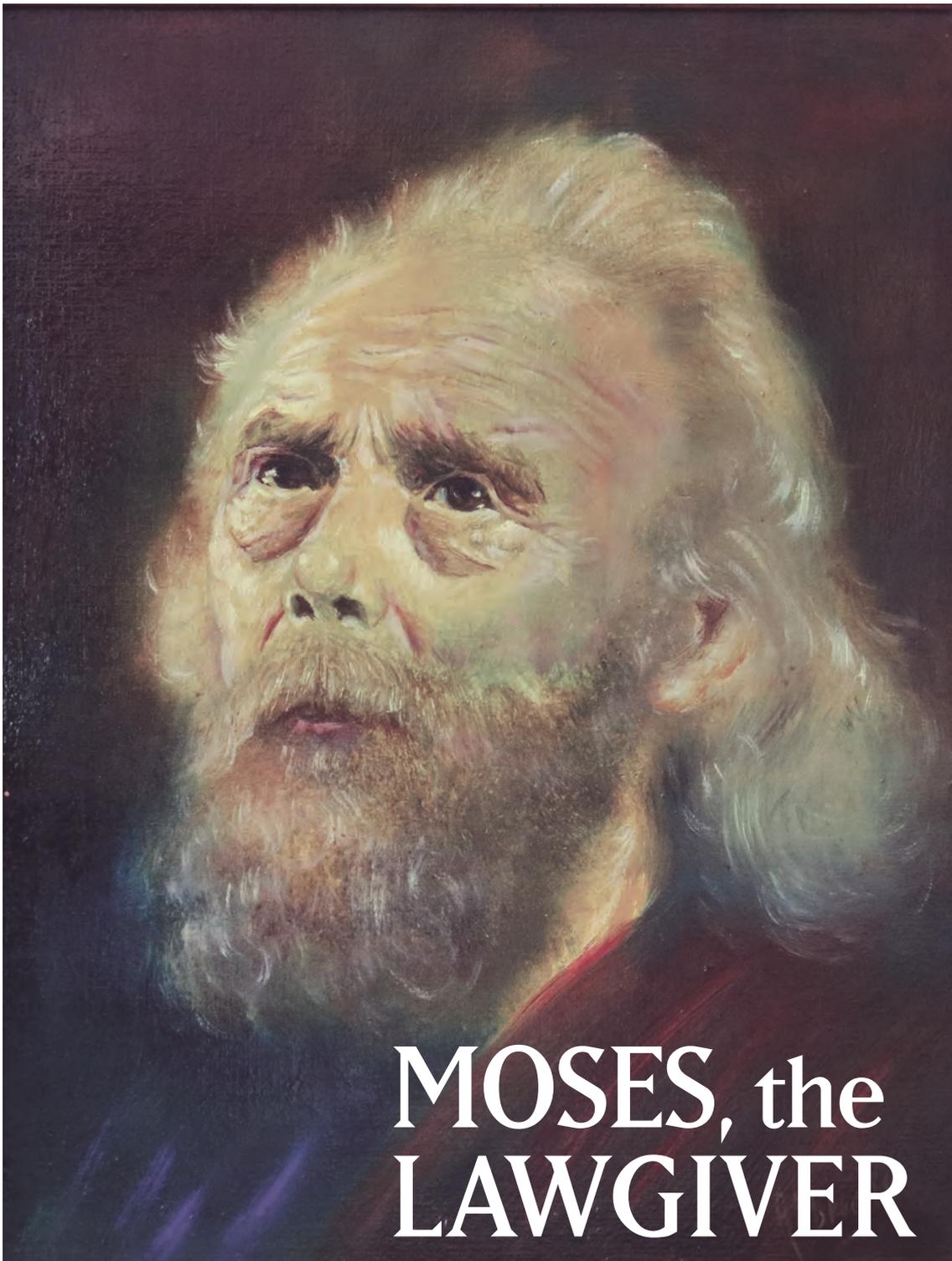


faith in FOCUS

Volume 46/1 February 2019



MOSES, the
LAWGIVER

Contents

Moses – the Man and his times	3
Lawgiver and Prophet	6
Outward focus	
Eighteen Prayers to Pray for Unbelievers	10
Letters from New Zealand	12
Focus on home	
Auckland Presbytery report	
Wellington Presbytery report	13
Books in focus	15
World in focus	17
Missions in focus	
John Chau's death was a missionary failure nobody should emulate	19
Book Review:	
My chains fell off	22

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Editorial

Welcome to issue 46/1 of *Faith in Focus*, in Anno Domini 2019. The significance of this year is much like many other years – the time draws closer to the Lord of Glory coming on the clouds of heaven, to usher in the consummation of the ages.

However, this issue is not specifically about His coming, but rather about a time, which foreshadowed the coming of the Messiah and His salvific mission.

It seems reasonable to me to assume that everyone who is a serious student of the Scriptures, and been instructed in them, knows about the man Moses. In the history of salvation, his prominence is as significant as that of Abraham and King David, but less than that of Jesus Christ, who is preeminent over all (Col 1:15-20).

Nonetheless, he is a huge figure in history as a servant of the Lord, whom the Lord spoke to face-to-face and not in dreams and visions. He enjoyed a relationship to the Covenant God unlike any other man in history, apart from Christ Himself, Who enjoyed intimate familial fellowship with YHWH.

The Lord has done wonderful things, in that an Israelite born in captivity in Egypt would be exalted, humbled and exalted again as the Prophet of the Lord Most High, to lead His people out of bondage in Egypt to the promised land.

He led God's people for 40 years – a stiff-necked people, a complaining people, a challenging people and at heart a rebellious people, who needed to learn the fear of the Lord.

Throughout history, the Lord God has brought forth men, put His Spirit upon them and equipped them to do His will. The secular historians and those in Hollywood will never understand the man Moses, nor the events in which he was involved. He was a man for his time and very much a man for the time in which the Lord had placed him.

Our contributors write about Moses the Lawgiver, prophet, mediator and servant of the Lord.

Mr Sjirk Bajema introduces the life and times of Moses.

Mr Andre Holtslag writes of a Lawgiver and Prophet and the use of the Law.

Mrs Sally Davey shares Tim Challies' suggestions for praying for the as-yet unbelieving.

We consider some snippets by the late D. G. Vanderpyl.

For *Missions in Focus*, Mr Lyman Stone offers a serious critique of the fatal mission of John Chau.

We have *World in focus* and some book reviews.

Cover image: This artists impression of Moses used to hang on the lounge wall in the home of my father-in-law. It now has pride of place on mine. **Ed.**

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

NB: In line with common publishing practice *Faith in Focus* reserves the right to publish the names of all contributors with their articles, unless compelling reasons are given to the editor for not doing so. This applies to both print and online versions.

Moses – the Man and his times

Sjirk Bajema

Numbers 12:3 tells us, “Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.” This is quite a statement. It is not a description of Moses that would readily come to the minds of many if they were to be asked about him. We can easily think of Moses as the impulsive one, he who rashly killed the Egyptian beating a fellow Hebrew; we can recall his hesitancy to be the one to speak for the Lord and his pressing

request that his brother Aaron be called to do this; and we can remember his anger shown as he threw down the two tablets of stone at the foot of Mt Sinai and as he hits his stick in fury causing the water to gush out of the rock at Meribah. But meekness, or humility as it’s also called, wouldn’t straight away pop up in our thoughts.

This is where we see how powerful the process of growing in holiness is. For it could well have been true of the young Moses and the middle-aged Moses that he was not particularly humble. Yet

The pyramids of Giza close to the city Cairo. The Land of Goshen (Hebrew: Eretz Gošen) is named in the Bible as the place in Egypt given to the Hebrews by the pharaoh of Joseph (Genesis 45:9-10), and the land from which they later left Egypt at the time of the Exodus. It was located in the lush eastern Delta of the Nile. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>



Photo by Stijn te Strake on Unsplash

The word “meek” can imply an aspect of weakness. But scripturally, as we know from Matthew 5:5, it actually speaks of a truly religious man. It is a word that describes a man who accepts the need to learn and the need to be forgiven. This is the man who truly knows his place before God.

this is the very characteristic that marks Moses in his later years.

Now the word “meek” can imply an aspect of weakness. But scripturally, as we know from Matthew 5:5, it actually speaks of a truly religious man. It is a word that describes a man who accepts the need to learn and the need to be forgiven. This is the man who truly knows his place before God. He has a true humility that wipes away pride. It’s no wonder this beatitude declares that such a man will inherit the earth. He is not full of himself – he’s full of the Lord! And how much doesn’t he look forward to being with the Lord forever?

Let’s consider, then, the path the Lord took Moses through to reach such an honoured position. How is it that he is today regarded as the foremost of the Old Testament prophets – by both Christian and Jew alike?

His upbringing

Here we look at the first forty years of his life. And already, right from birth, he is marked out differently. Being brought up in a fraught time for the Hebrew people, his mother in Exodus 2:2 recognises Moses as a fine child. And so it was she hid him from the Egyptians who had made the law that all male children born to the Hebrews were to be killed upon birth. Then, when at the age of three months, and realising she could hide him no longer, she placed him in a basket made of bulrushes and floated him along the river, knowing that the daughter of Pharaoh would be coming down at that time and place to bathe at the river. There Miriam was strategically placed, so that when Pharaoh’s daughter sought a nurse-maid for the child it could be done by his own Mum. It is this incident in his life that gave Moses his name which means being drawn out of the water.

It was in God’s will that this would be not only the way the baby Moses was spared his life but also the way “Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22).” This would involve a series of different teachers and tutors, who themselves were highly placed men close to the king. Their respective languages were quite close, and there was much interaction with the Canaanite peoples. Other historical accounts of the time indicate a varied cosmopolitan mix to the court of Pharaoh, so that there were many different ethnicities present and accepted.

Stephen says further in his speech

to the Sanhedrin that Moses in his first forty years “was mighty in his words and deeds.” In this way, despite the little we do know of the first third of his life, it was not without a clear indication of the qualities that would be needed later in a leadership capacity. But after forty years away from Egypt and with the increased maturity they could see he had, together with the passing away of all those who had been seeking his life, the Lord’s time for his people’s freedom was ripe.

Yet throughout this period he was fully aware of where he had come from. And this the Hebrews also knew, but certainly not in any sense of respect, as we see in what was said to him the day after he had struck down an Egyptian beating a Hebrew (Exodus 2:14).

His humbling

It is after fleeing Pharaoh’s anger for the death of the Egyptian that Moses enters the second distinct phase of his life – the next forty years. This was spent in the land of Midian where he became an exile. These were a people who also were descendants of Abraham (Genesis 25:1-6) and who may have held on to the worship of the Lord God in a particular way. It was in this land that he lived with the family of the priest of Midian. This priest gave Moses his daughter Ziporah to be his wife.

Of this forty year period there is little said in Scripture. Like the first forty years there is much in the way of extra-biblical legendary tales but as to God’s Word there is the simple noting of his keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro.

But much as Moses appears to be out of the picture as far as Israel is concerned, the Lord hasn’t forgotten him. In fact, for forty years he was working on him in that foreign land, sanctifying him for the calling he had planned out for him. As the apostle Paul spent time apart soon after his conversion, so Moses needed to be apart for this time.

Then, in what is a clear theophany – a visible manifestation of God to man – the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in flames of fire from within a bush, forty years after his fleeing from Egypt. This occurred on Mt Horeb (also known as Sinai). Moses was surprised that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. It is no wonder Moses went over to see this strange sight. As he does that, God calls out to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

Now it is clear to him who is there. And soon enough he tells him what he

must now do for the God of his Fathers – the covenant Lord. All of his upbringing while being nursed by his mother, receiving education in the house of Pharaoh and the time of humbling in Midian were used to prepare him for the special task of being the great leader and lawgiver through whom God brought Israel out of Egypt. He was especially chosen to help set up a nation for the Lord God's service. He was the one particularly gifted to bring his people within reach of the land promised to their forefathers.

Moses balks, however, at the call of the Lord. He offers up three different excuses to the Lord – all excuses which the Lord counters effectively through the declaration of who he is, the demonstration of powerful signs given to Moses (the staff that became a snake, the hand that became leprous, and the water turning to blood in Exodus 4:1-9), and the provision of his brother Aaron as his spokesman (Exodus 4:10-17).

But the Lord hasn't finished with preparing Moses for his vividly powerful confrontations with Pharaoh. At a lodging place on the way to Egypt the Lord tries to kill Moses. It is an account in Exodus 4:24-26 which can throw us. What exactly is going on?

While we do not know the immediate context it is clear that Moses has failed to obey God by not having his second son circumcised. And the displeasure of the Lord is clear. It is only through Zipporah's drastic and immediate response that Moses lives.

His leading

It is now that Moses takes on in an active way his appointed position of leadership. He meets with Aaron on his way in, telling him all that has happened. Then they both went and spoke with the elders of the people of Israel. After speaking to them Aaron spoke to the people of Israel and Moses showed the signs to them. There was the response of belief in what he said and did. After hearing that the Lord had visited his people and seen their trouble they bowed in worship.

It is not long, though, and they realise the character of what they are up against. Pharaoh is determined not to let the Israelites go. He imposes even harder work upon them, which brings further pressure on Moses. But each time again there is that communion with the Lord in prayer and listening to his Word.

Then there come the ten plagues. And what plagues they were! But each

time again Pharaoh's heart was hardened. He ignored it, he lied to Moses, and he twisted and turned. But nothing changed and each time again Moses would faithfully go on. Pharaoh would not let the people of Israel go. After the plagues of water turned to blood, the frogs, the gnats, the flies, the death of all the Egyptian livestock in the fields, the boils, the hail, the locusts, the darkness, and the threatening of the final plague – the death of every firstborn of Egypt, man or beast – it was the same response.

Following the institution of the Passover the tenth plague occurred. This time Pharaoh relented and sent the people of Israel away. Thus there came about the Exodus – the mass departure of some 2.4 million Israelites and others (This we understand from Exodus 12:37 describing some 600,000 men on foot and multiplying that by four to include the women, children and those not of military age or health). It is this huge number that the Lord miraculously feeds with manna (the equivalent of bread which came from heaven) and quail (Exodus 16:1-36).

What cannot but be noticed throughout this time is the communion Moses has with God. It is especially heightened as they arrive at the mount of Horeb – Sinai – and Moses goes up the mountain to receive the Law from the Lord. What he receives there is detailed for us in Exodus chapters 20 till 33. But let's also note the times Moses went up to fellowship with the Lord in the chapters 19 till 34.

So, how many times do you think Moses went up to meet God in these chapters? Perhaps two or three? You know there is one for sure. And you know that he went back up to intercede for Israel after their committing idolatry. So there are at least these two and perhaps one or two others. But to see that there were actually eight ascents is something else! Not only does it tell us of the crucial matter that is being conveyed to Israel here but also the key place of Moses in all of this. It is certainly a place acknowledged by the Hebrews in Exodus 20:18-19 when after the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking they recognised their own lack of intimacy with the Lord and so they pleaded with Moses to speak to God for them.

The seventh ascent in Exodus 32:32 has a completely different focus than the six that came before or the ascent that

What happened at Mt. Sinai was monumental in the history not only of God's people but of the whole world. So much of what gives the secure framework our society is based on, and what has helped the world, originates from what happened there.

followed. This time Moses went up not to receive from the Lord but rather to desperately plead for the people after their grievous sin of building the golden calf and committing idolatry through it.

These were a people Moses long struggled with on the extended journey through the wilderness their sin had brought upon them. Indeed, none of that generation – bar two, Joshua and Caleb – eventually entered the Promised Land. Even Moses himself, through the blasphemous sin of striking the rock for water at Meribah without calling upon the name of the Lord, was not allowed into the Promised Land, but could only look upon it from a distance.

Yet, if anything, striking the rock at Meribah as he did sinfully shows up the rest of his life as one that was lived faith-

fully. This one exception in his leading God's people proves to us how much he was at one with the Lord his God in leading Israel. He was being constantly sanctified throughout his life so that at the end of it Numbers 12:3 is indeed true. He was very meek and so he was powerfully used by the Lord. The way he received and implemented advice from his father-in-law regarding a more efficient way to perform his role as judge over Israel is one example of this (Exodus 18:13-27).

What happened at Mt. Sinai was monumental in the history not only of God's people but of the whole world. So much of what gives the secure framework our society is based on, and what has helped the world, originates from what happened there. How much don't

we realise that with what happens when we leave those ways? But let's not forget the man God chose and equipped to be his lawgiver. In giving the Law the covenant God revealed his holiness, clearly spelled out sin, and gave the way that would in time bring us to Christ. So how much wasn't Moses the Lawgiver a type of the Messiah who was to come? And how much doesn't his mediation on Mt. Sinai vividly focus us on what Christ would do perfectly on the cross? In the same way Moses offered himself for his people to take their punishment upon him so Christ actually did – and perfectly.

Mr Sjirk Bajema is the minister in the Reformed Church in Oamaru.

Moses, the Lawgiver

Lawgiver and Prophet

The Bible search program on my computer tells me that Moses' name is mentioned 834 times in the Bible. As you would expect, 636 of these mentions are in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, where the events of Moses' life are described. The Rev. Sjirk Bajema has already done a wonderful job of describing Moses and his life. But what about the other 200-odd mentions of Moses? What is it about Moses in the *whole* Bible that makes him significant for us today?

Well, once you get past the books mentioned above, a vast majority of the other mentions of Moses' name are this exact phrase, "the Law of Moses," or words to the effect of "that the Lord commanded Moses." And even the many debates that the Lord Jesus had with the Pharisees were about the Law of Moses. So if we are going to think about Moses in the Scriptures as a whole, we must begin with **MOSES, THE LAWGIVER.**

Moses was given the Law of the Lord at Mt. Sinai. The Law included what we

call the *ceremonial* law (worship/sacrifice), the *civil* law (judicial), and the *moral* law, which is best summarized by the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5). Chapter 19 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* explains that the ceremonial laws were fulfilled in Christ and the civil laws "place no obligation upon anyone now, except as they embody general principles of justice." The moral law, however, "binds all people at all times to obedience." In other words, one of the chief ways that Moses affects us today is that we are to obey the Ten Commandments.

Now, **not everyone agrees with this idea.**

Lex Bayor, an executive at Airbnb, and John Figdor, a humanist chaplain at Stanford University, both committed atheists, decided that we do not need Moses and his Ten Commandments anymore. For their book, '*Atheist Heart, Humanist Mind,*' they invited people to submit modern alternatives to the famous Decalogue. They then had a panel of 13

judges select the 10 new Non-commandments from the 2,800 submissions. So here are their Ten Non-commandments.

1. Be open-minded and be willing to alter your beliefs with new evidence.
2. Strive to understand what is most likely to be true, not to believe what you wish to be true.
3. The scientific method is the most reliable way of understanding the natural world.
4. Every person has the right to the control of their body.
5. God is not necessary to be a good person or to live a full and meaningful life.
6. Be mindful of the consequences of all your actions and recognize that you must take responsibility for them.
7. Treat others as you would want them to treat you, and can reasonably expect them to want to be treated. Think about their perspective.
8. We have the responsibility to consider others, including future generations.



Photo by Tanner Mardis on Unsplash

- 9. There is no one right way to live.
- 10. Leave the world a better place than you found it.

Perhaps you noticed that non-commandment 7 is really the ‘golden rule’ of the Lord Jesus from Matthew 7:12! And despite calling these the Ten Non-commandments, so as to avoid them sounding like they are actually commandments, they are actually commandments! Every single one of them is telling us what we *ought* to do/think. As Kevin De Young has observed in his book *‘The 10 Commandments’*:

We live in a paradoxical age where many will say, ‘Right and wrong is what you decide for yourself,’ and yet these same people will rebuke others for violating any number of assumed commands. As a culture, we may be quite free and liberal when it comes to sex, but we can be absolutely fundamentalist when it comes to the moral claims of the sexual revolution. The old swear words may not scandalize us any longer, but now there are other words – offensive slurs and insults – that will quickly put someone out of polite company.

And anyway, doesn’t the 9th Non-commandment commandment make the other 9 redundant!? If there is no one way to live, then surely I am free to ignore the other commandments!

But even if we step inside the church, there are plenty of people there who also think that we do not need the Ten Commandments anymore. One example is Pastor Andy Stanley (AS). AS is the son

of Charles Stanley, the TV preacher. He is the senior pastor of North Point Community Church, which has six campuses and over 32,000 attendees each week! He has just written a book called *‘Invincible’* that is about the new of the New Testament. The book’s main thrust is that modern Christianity relies too much on the Old Testament. And this, says AS, is why Christianity has ‘lost its mojo.’ One of the Old Testament things that Andy Stanley takes aim at is the Ten Commandments. He says to New Testament believers, “The Ten Commandments have no authority over you. None. To be clear: Thou shalt not obey the Ten Commandments.”

So, must we obey the Ten Commandments? Or not? Are they relevant today? What does the Bible say?

Well, some **general observations** about the Ten Commandments are already quite instructive:

You will remember that God commanded Moses to make two tablets of stone. He then **wrote the commandments on the tablets with His own finger** (Deut. 4:13). But when Moses brought them down the mountain he found the people worshipping a golden calf and “he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.” So then God told Moses to cut two new tablets and He wrote the commandments on the tablets with His finger, again (Exodus 34). And those tablets were eventually put into the Ark of the Covenant and stored in the Holy of Holies. So the very special attention given to the Ten Commandments already makes it clear that there was something permanent about them.

So, must we obey the Ten Commandments? Or not? Are they relevant today? What does the Bible say?

As believers, we have been set free from the curse of the law, but not from our duty to obey them. To be sure, the law is not a ladder to salvation; we are saved by *grace* alone, which rests in *Christ* alone, which is received by *faith* alone. But we are saved that we might obey God's law because we love Christ and because we are thankful to God.

Another relevant matter is that **the laws found in the Ten Commandments did not begin at Mt. Sinai**. Already, at Creation, we see that God established the pattern of six days work and one day of rest (4th). We also see marriage, which is to be lifelong and between one man and one woman (7th). And soon after that we learn from the story of Cain and Abel that murder is wrong (6th), and then from Abraham and Jacob that lying is wrong (9th). So the Ten Commandments simply collected the moral law of God and put them down on stone/paper.

We also find the Commandments **quoted or restated or applied in the New Testament** (Romans 13:8-9; 1 Tim. 1:8-10). A major change to the 4th Commandment was the change of day from the Saturday Sabbath to the Sunday Lord's Day, because that is the day that Jesus rose from the dead. But still we see New Testament believers gathering for worship on the Lord's Day (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1) and instruction not to neglect meeting together, as some were doing, in Hebrews 10:25.

There are also **some very specific words about the Law of Moses in the New Testament**: In Romans 7:12, the Apostle Paul says, "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." The problem is not the law but how our sinful nature is naturally inclined to respond to the law.

As we continue to think, then, about whether or not we must obey the Ten Commandments, let's step back from our consideration of Moses the Lawgiver to a more wide-angle consideration of **MOSES THE PROPHET**.

Exodus 33 tells us that **God spoke with Moses "face to face."** In fact, when Miriam and Aaron challenged Moses' leadership (Numbers 12), God rebuked them, saying, "When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" So Moses was the pre-eminent prophet!

Later on, though, God told the people of Israel that He would send them a greater Moses (**Deuteronomy 18:18-19**). He said, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever

will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him." This greater Moses was revealed to be the Lord Jesus. For it was on the Mount of Transfiguration, when Jesus was accompanied by Moses, that the Father said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; *listen to Him* (emphasis added)."

So, let's do that now as we consider **what Jesus Himself said about the Law of Moses**:

In **Matthew 5:17-19**, He said,

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

He also said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments (John 14:15)." And just in case anyone would suggest that the commandments Jesus taught are different from the Ten Commandments, when asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus said, Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbour as yourself, for "on these two commandments hang the whole law and prophets." It is commonly believed that God wrote the first four commandments – the ones that are mainly about love for Him – on one tablet, and the last six commandments – the ones that are mainly about love for neighbour – on the other tablet. So Jesus was not giving new commandments but summarizing the Law of Moses. The commandments of Jesus are the Ten Commandments.

I hope it is clear now that we are to obey the Ten Commandments. As we conclude, let's consider the three ways that the Ten Commandments function today:

1. God has given us the Ten Commandments as a mirror

If you want to know how you really look, you look in a mirror. And in the same way, the law tells us the true spiritual condition of our heart. A paraphrase of Romans 3:20 says, "*For no one can ever be made right with God by doing*

what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are." The Heidelberg Catechism quotes Jesus' summary of the law and then asks, "Can you live up to all this perfectly?" The answer? "No. I have a natural tendency to hate God and my neighbour." So, the law of God helps us see that we are sinners. And we know from the Bible that the wages of sin is death. We deserve eternal condemnation in hell.

But God hasn't just given us the Law; He has also given us the gospel! The Gospel tells us that Jesus came "to save His people from their sins." And it tells us, "Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." So, like a mirror, the Ten Commandments show us our sin THAT WE MIGHT SEEK JESUS AS OUR SAVIOUR.

2. The Ten Commandments also RESTRAIN EVIL.

What do you think would happen if the government announced tomorrow that there are no more road rules and no more fines or penalties; that we could drive at any speed, do not need a WOF, do not have to give way,

and can choose what side of the road we want to drive on? Do you think the roads would become safer or more dangerous? The fact is that road rules make for safer roads. And in the same way, the Ten Commandments make for a safer and happier society. We need rules and we need the threat of punishment to keep each person from doing what seems right in his or her own eyes. And because God created the world, it is His law that we should follow. We should be like the people of Israel who said, "The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey (Joshua 24:24)." So, the Ten Commandments are also given to restrain evil.

3. And thirdly and lastly, the Ten Commandments are a GUIDE for CHRISTIAN living

The law as a restraint on evil applies to absolutely everyone. But this function of the law is for believers. One of the verses we mentioned above was John 14:15, where Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." The believer is an adopted child of God. We should be soooooo thankful for our adoption in

Christ that we eagerly want to know how to please our Father in heaven. In this way, then, the law becomes our school of love and thankfulness and righteousness. We study the law of God so that we might learn what pleases Him and what offends Him. This is how the Ten Commandments function as a guide for Christian living.

So, contrary to what Andy Stanley says, The Ten Commandments DO have authority over you. Thou SHALT obey the Ten Commandments. As believers, we have been set free from the curse of the law, but not from our duty to obey it. To be sure, the law is not a ladder to salvation; we are saved by grace alone, which rests in Christ alone, which is received by faith alone. But we are saved that we might obey God's law because we love Christ and because we are thankful to God.

This is the legacy of Moses the Law-giver and Moses the prophet.

Mr Andre Holtslag is the minister on the Reformed Church in Avondale.

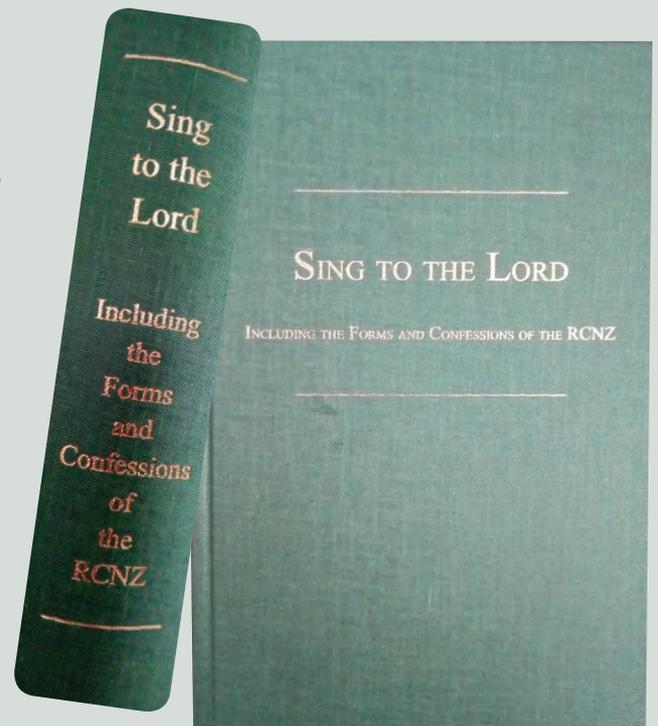
SING TO THE LORD

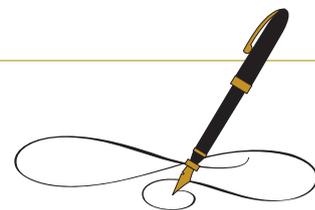
More information on the newly printed Sing to the Lord book

- It is a smaller book with somewhat smaller dimensions and weighing more than 200gms less than the larger book, making it easier to hold.
- It includes the RCNZ confessions, forms, and church order.
- It has thumb tabs to help locate the indexes, confessions, and forms.
- Though the paper is slightly thinner, it is still opaque enough for clarity.
- The cost is **\$15**, plus postage when applicable.

The books will be available from your local church or by contacting:

Stuart Williams at stu@faanz.co.nz





Eighteen Prayers to Pray for Unbelievers

Blogger Tim Challies recently reposted this list of prayers we could — and should — pray for our as-yet unbelieving friends. Perhaps no prayers are more important than those we pray for the salvation of others; and few that we can be more resolutely sure please God. He does not desire that any should perish; and if we love our friends, neither do we. But *how* should we pray? How do we express the yearning of our hearts that our loved friend escape the judgement to come? What words do we use? How do we contend with God in the way that Abraham did in Genesis Chapter 18, or as did the persistent widow of Luke 18? Challies shows us how, in the words of the Bible itself.

Note also that we should pray for our own efforts to bring Christ to our friends. We need help, we need wisdom and we need persevering faithfulness. We can ask God for all of these. Here, then, is Challies in his own words:

A friend asked the question: How do I pray for unbelievers? How do I pray effectively? I trust that every Christian regularly prays for family or friends or colleagues or neighbors who do not yet know the Lord. And while we can and must pray for matters related to their lives and circumstances, the emphasis of our prayers must always be for their salvation. Here are some ways the Bible can guide our prayers.

Prayers for salvation

We begin with prayers for salvation. Each of these prayers seeks the same thing, but in a different way or from a different angle or using different language. Each of them is grounded in a specific text of Scripture.

Pray that God would circumcise their hearts. Circumcision was the Old Testament sign of entering into God's covenant, of being God's people. To have

a circumcised heart symbolizes having a heart that is fully joined to God, fully submissive to him. "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live" (Deuteronomy 30:6).

Pray that God would give them a heart of flesh. The Bible contrasts a heart of flesh, a heart that is alive and responsive to God, to a heart of stone, a heart that is cold and unyielding. Pray that God would work within these unbelievers to change their hearts. "And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh..." (Ezekiel 11:19).

Pray that God would put his Spirit within them. The great joy of salvation is being indwelt by God himself. Pray that God would grant this honor to those unbelievers, that he would choose to take up residence within them. "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules" (Ezekiel 36:27).

Pray that they would come to Christ. If unbelievers are to come to salvation, there is just one way. They must come through Christ and Christ alone. "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'" (John 14:6). Remember, too, that he is the one who calls them to come and to be relieved of the burden of their sin (see Matthew 11:28-30).

Pray that God would open their hearts to believe the gospel. Once more, God must initiate and people must respond. So pray that God would open the hearts of these unbelievers so they can in turn believe, just as Lydia did. "The Lord

opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul” (Acts 16:14).

Pray that God would free them from the slavery of sin. Unbelievers may believe they are free, but they are in fact enslaved. They are slaves of sin, bound by their sin and sinfulness. Pray that God would liberate them by his gospel. “But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed” (Romans 6:17).

Pray that God would remove Satan’s blinding influence. Unbelievers have been blinded by Satan and will only ever be able to see and appreciate the gospel if God works within them. So pray that God would give them sight—spiritual sight. “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Pray that God would grant them repentance. Unbelievers cannot repent without the enabling grace of God. So pray that God would grant them repentance, that this repentance would lead them to a knowledge of the truth. Pray as well that *they would come to their*

senses and that they would escape from the devil’s snare. “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:25-26).

Prayers for you

You have prayed for unbelievers using different words and approaching from different angles. But you should also pray for yourself.

Pray that you will develop a relationship with them. For people to be saved they must first hear the good news of the gospel. For them to hear the good news of the gospel, they must first encounter Christians—Christians like you. Pray that you would develop deeper, more significant relationship with them so you can, in turn, speak truth. “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Romans 10:14).

Pray for opportunities to minister to them. Many people come to faith after seeing Christ’s love displayed through the ministry of Christians. Pray for opportu-

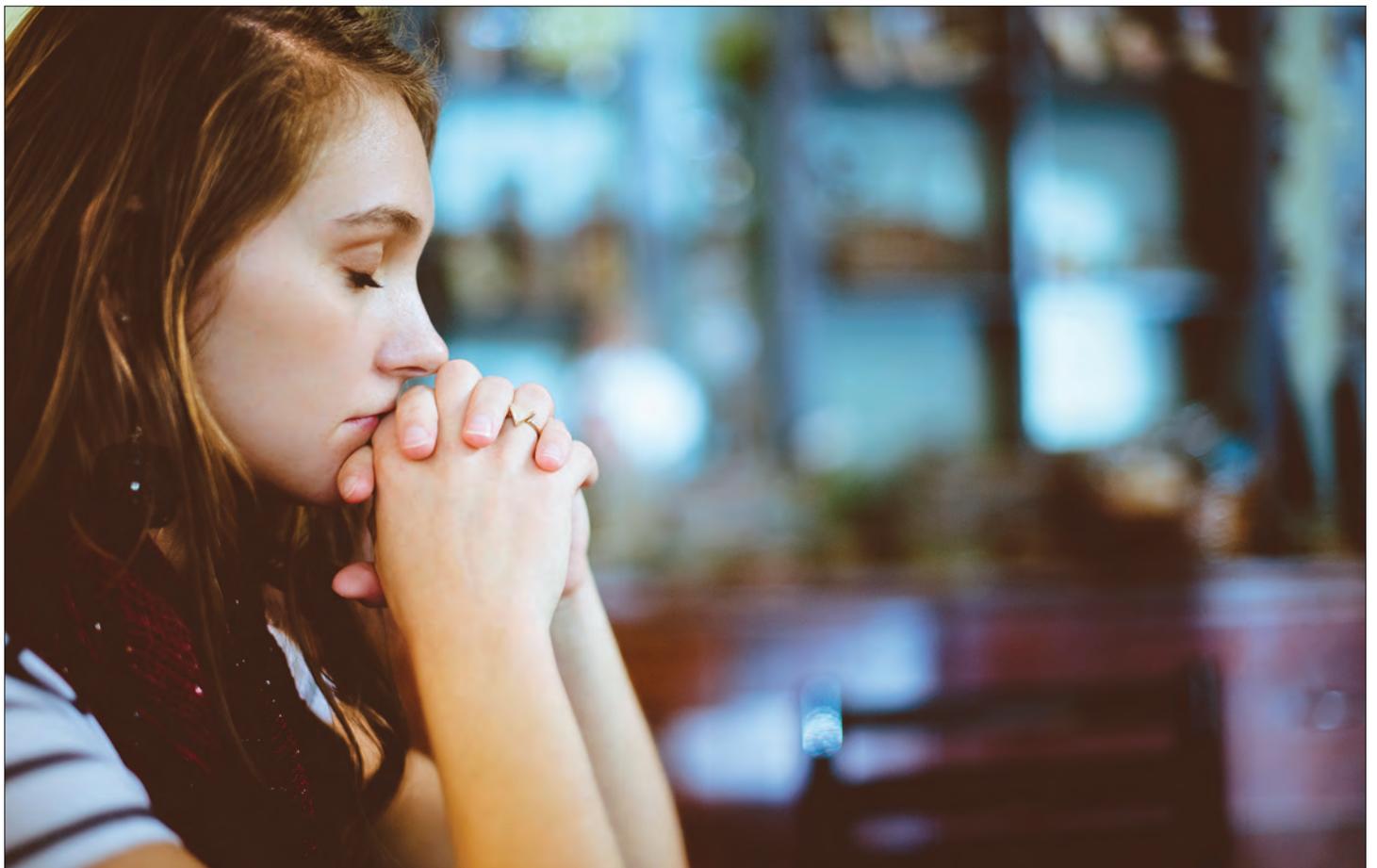


Photo by Ben White on Unsplash

nities to minister to unbelievers so that your ministry can have an evangelistic effect. "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Pray for them faithfully and persistently. Our temptation is to grow discouraged in prayer, to pray for a while and, when we see no visible results, to give up. But God calls us to persevere in prayer. "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2). (See also the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8.)

Pray for a burden to plead for their souls. Paul was willing to tell the church at Rome of his great longing to see the salvation of the lost. Do you share this deep longing? Pray that God would give you a great burden for souls. "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved" (Romans 10:1).

Pray for boldness in generating and taking opportunities to speak the gospel. Even Paul longed for this boldness and for the confidence that he was speaking the right and best words. Pray that God would give you the boldness and, that when you take the opportunities, that he would then guide your words. "[Pray] also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel..."

(Ephesians 6:19).

Pray for other believers to encounter them. God almost always uses a succession of people to share the gospel with people before they are saved. Pray, then, that God would lead other Christians into the lives of the unbelievers you love, that they too would provide an example of Christian living and that they too would speak the gospel. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Other prayers

Here are a few more biblical emphases to guide your prayers.

Pray that God would use any circumstance to do his work in them. We pray to a God who is sovereign and who sovereignly works his good will. Often he saves people through difficult circumstances, through bringing them to the very end of themselves. Pray, then, that God would arrange circumstances, whether easy or difficult, to lead them to salvation. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word" (Psalm 119:67). As you pray for the unbelievers you love, always pray to God: "your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Pray that God would extend his mercy to them. God assures us that he wishes for all people to turn to him in repentance and faith. He receives no joy

from seeing people perish. Pray, then, that God would be glorified in the salvation of these people. "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Pray with confidence. Finally, pray with confidence. God expects we will pray, God invites us to pray, God commands us to pray. Why? Because God loves to hear us pray and God loves to respond to our prayers. So as you pray for unbelievers, pray with confidence that God hears your prayers. "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5:16).¹

Endnotes

¹ <https://www.challies.com/articles/how-to-pray-for-unbelievers/> (originally posted on November 15, 2016.)

I hope you found this helpful. It has certainly helped me as I've systematically prayed for those in my life who need to believe in the Lord Jesus. SD

Letters from New Zealand

D. G. Vanderpyl

August 1981

"Clergy preach but don't practice." That was the headline on the front page of the Auckland Star, an Auckland daily newspaper. The article explained why the New Zealand clergy generally do not practice what they preach, according to a survey by the National Council of Churches. According to this survey, it seems that faith and action are far apart and that a great deal of clergy talk lacks the action to back it up. A vast reservoir of beliefs is in search of action programmes in which to express them.

The report stated that ministers who

believe in pulpit expressions of political views were mostly liberal and action orientated. Both the liberal and traditional churches display two ways of avoiding effective action. One is the traditional programme of the conservative which is to prevent action; the other is the soft way of the liberal who has so many beautiful ideas of freedom and justice that he too succeeds in mostly talking, and doing very little.

Asked for their opinions on the report, Auckland church leaders said that it was too early to comment on the survey. I think that was quite a "politically correct" answer.

September

The Avondale church had the privilege of being selected "to go on air." The morning service "was recorded by technicians from Radio New Zealand for future broadcasting. It sure was an exciting time for both preacher (Rev. John Goris) and the members of the church. We've just heard that the recording has been officially approved for nationwide broadcasting. I wonder what determined the approval, the content of the sermon or its presentation?

December

A mysterious thing happened in the Mangere church during the Springbok tour. Sometime ago the church had a large sign erected on the fence around the church with the name "Reformed (Presbyterian) Church of Mangere" in bold letters. A group in the church objected to the name "Presbyterian" and a blank piece of wood was nailed across the objectionable word. The session then decided to have a professional repaint the whole thing with the name "The Re-

formed Church of Mangere" once again in bold letters, for all passers-by to read. But now comes the mystery. At the peak of the protest movement against South Africa, the Mangere worshippers found that section of the fence which had the sign attached to it, flat on its face, like Dagon in Gaza. Some thought that the cause must have been a strong wind during the night, others reckoned that anti-tour protesters pushed it down. And the pro-Presbyterians asked, "Could it be an act of God?" Anyway, the anti-Presbyterians hastily re-erected that part of

the fence, with the sign still attached to it, and added some extra reinforcement.

In my letter in the September issue, I may have given the impression that the Silverstream congregation unilaterally had decided to change their name from "Reformed" to "Reformed Presbyterian". However, I received a telephonic rap over the knuckles. They did not make that change without first consulting their Presbytery and receiving their consent. Hope I've got it correct this time.

Abridged

Focus on home

Auckland Presbytery Short Report – November 2018.

The Auckland Presbytery met on Friday 23 November at the Reformed Church of Pukekohe.

The delegates for the convening church of Hukanui were delayed when neither the elder delegate nor the alternate were available, so they had to find another delegate at the last minute. Who says nothing exciting ever happens at Presbytery? Because of this, Avondale stepped in for them and the Rev. Andre Holtslag gave us a preview of his Sunday sermon on John 9:1-7. He noted that the blind man is a picture of humanity estranged from God and in need of Jesus' healing touch. We, as sinners, have been called out of darkness into his light by grace alone, through faith alone. In response, we are called to declare this Gospel to others. We then sang Psalm 146 from *Sing to the Lord*.

The Avondale delegates then checked the credentials, voting to receive the Bucklands Beach delegates, who were credential-less, and the Hukanui "ring in." After the delegates stood to signify agreement with the doctrinal standards, the Rev. Daniel Wilson took the chair as moderator with the Rev. Graeme Zuidema as vice moderator. Having said that, this meeting may have set a record

for the number of times the chair was passed around throughout the meeting as various issues were discussed!

After the minutes were approved, discussion moved to matters arising. The Mangere church property has been sold and the Church Extension Committee has suggested that the funds be held in the Auckland Presbytery for future church planting work. On investigating the Mangere trust deed, it was found that this decision must be made by a synod. Avondale agreed to prepare an overture to the Synod about this matter.

Avondale has put Mr Brett Cooper's name forward as a student for the ministry. The Reverends Ryan Sparks and Daniel Wilson presented the report on their meeting with Brett and his wife, Alison. After discussion, the Presbytery approved Brett as a student for the ministry. It is expected that Brett will do an internship year in Avondale during 2019 before taking up full-time study at the RTC in 2020.

Bucklands Beach had presented four songs for Presbytery approval but these were held over for consideration at the

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Contact Sharon Heerema
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February meeting, since some sessions had not had time to consider them. North Shore has put Mr Jae Kim forward as a Student for the Ministry and the Presbytery appointed Andre Holtslag and Leo de Vos to meet with him and report to the February meeting. Daniel Wilson updated the Presbytery on North Shore's work in Maungakarema and a planned church plant for Orewa, and their hope to call a minister for each. The Presbytery was thankful to hear of these encouraging developments.

Church visitation reports for all the churches were discussed, with many

reasons for thanksgiving noted. Daniel Wilson is scheduled to lead the studies for the National Youth Camp and Graeme Zuidema will be leading studies at the Auckland Presbytery Cadets and Gems camp and also at the 2019 Easter Camp.

The Presbytery agreed to the Overseas Mission Board's recommendation to support the Reformed Church of Hamilton in sending Pieter and Joanna van der Wel to assist the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Port Vila. Several matters were discussed in closed session. The Pukekohe church advised that they are no longer able to assist the Hamilton church in working to transition the Tauranga Bible study group towards a church plant. The Hamilton church confirmed that they will continue to support the group there.

The Rev. Michael Willemse then closed in prayer and the meeting was adjourned at 10.33pm.

Reporter: Michael Willemse

The Road Show

All camouflaged in metal frame
hurtling down life's motorway
in cars of varied brand and name...
their mind-set clearly on display.

Near acrobatics on the road:
they think they're fully livin'
Imagining they know the code,
not knowing they are 'driven'!

Is it about "me first" and so,
who cares it grieves another?
This painful glamour on the road
is not to them a bother!

Though their identity is hid,
their number-plate will mark them:
drivers 'mature' or 'teenage kid',
yet by their fruits you'll know them.*

John Goris

*Matthew 7:20

Wellington Presbytery Short Report — November 2018

The Wellington Presbytery was convened on the second and third of November at Masterton with the first item of business being the final examination of Vicar David Stares, minister elect of the Masterton congregation. On Friday evening, with the recommendation of examiner the Rev. Peter Kloosterman and the concurrence of synodical examiners the Revs. John Haverland and Eric Stolte, David's sermon on Isaiah 43:1-7 was sustained. The following morning David was examined by the Rev. Hans Vaatstra on the doctrine of God, the Canons of Dort and family ethics. Old and New Testament passages were set and examined by the Rev. Peter van Huyssteen. David was asked a series of exegetical questions on Psalm 127 and 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 and what the main points of any sermon he might preach on these passages were. The Rev. Aaron Warner examined David on his knowledge of the Bible as well as the RCNZ church order. The final section of the

examination was conducted by the Rev. Ben McDonald, who selected the 2nd century A.D. to test David's knowledge on church history. Again with the concurrence of the synodical examiners, moderator Ben McDonald joyfully announced that David had sustained this section of his exam, thanks be to God. The happy consequences were that David's desire to serve as pastor and preacher was confirmed by the church and that he will be ordained as minister in the Masterton congregation.

Questions from article 47 of the RCNZ Church Order were asked of the Masterton, Palmerston North and Whanganui delegates. These are normally asked of each session every year for the purpose of encouraging Christian education, missions and good ecclesiastical practice in the churches.

Peter Kloosterman updated the Presbytery on recent overseas mission developments, including a proposal to send Pieter and Joanna van der Wel to Vanuatu. A motion to approve the Overseas Mission Board supporting the Reformed Church of Hamilton with sending Pieter and Joanna van der Wel to assist the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia by serving the mission church in Port Vila, Vanuatu was approved by Presbytery. We heard that approval was also required from the Auckland and South Island Presbyteries. The Presbytery was also advised that the Reformed Church of Silverstream had accepted the request to become the sending church for the mission in Papua New Guinea and that a replacement missionary couple were being considered to continue on with the work at the Bible College and in the churches.

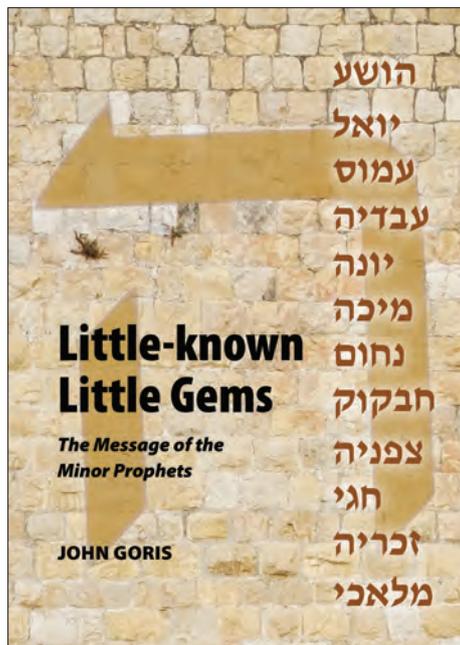
We were glad to hear that the Rev. Alan and sr. Odette Douma had settled well into the work in the Foxton congregation. Following an initial six weeks' preaching and pastoral work at Foxton it was envisaged that Alan would be available for call as minister of the word and sacraments in our denomination.

The Rev. Joshua Flinn provided an update on progress in the New Plymouth church plant. A time of prayer was set aside giving thanks to the Lord for the establishment of the church there as well as for the needs of minister and congregation and especially the need for extra leadership in that church.

Ben McDonald closed the meeting with a brief devotion on the account of the Lord Jesus meeting with a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28) and prayer.

Reporter, Hans Vaatstra

Books in focus



Little-known Little Gems: The Message of the Minor Prophets

John Goris

Published by Matrix Typography,

\$20.00 (including postage within NZ)

ISBN 978-0-473-45672-6

Though it makes up about two-thirds of the Bible, the Old Testament is often unfamiliar territory to many Christians. And the twelve books that make up the minor prophets are likely even more unfamiliar. When was the last time you heard a sermon or series of sermons on, say, Obadiah? Jonah is perhaps the exception, but most of the minor prophets are strangers to many Christians. John Goris seeks to rectify this with this little survey.

The author is a retired pastor residing in New Zealand. He has served Reformed churches in both Australia and “the land of the long white cloud” (NZ). Rev. Goris has long had an interest in the minor prophets and this book is the fruit of his many years of study and preaching. Little-known Little Gems introduces us to each of the twelve books in turn. Goris summarizes the historical context, the contents, and the main message of each book.

Most importantly of all, the author connects the main message of each book to the New Testament and its revelation of Jesus Christ. Written clearly and

simply, it could aptly be used as a textbook for a high school Bible class exploring these books.

I’m thankful for books, like this one, which take the Scriptures seriously as inspired and inerrant revelation from God.

The author has full confidence in the authority of the Bible as timeless truth. Moreover, he has an excellent understanding not only of the diversity amongst these twelve books, but also their fundamental unity as divine Scripture.

I recommend Little-known Little Gems to anyone looking to fortify their grasp on this part of God’s Word.

Rev Wes Bredenhof Launceston

Little-known Little Gems is available in print and electronic formats.

Contact the publisher to order:

walter@matrix-typography.co.nz

In Australia available at Pro Ecclesia Bookshop

O Death, Where Is Thy Sting?

by John Murray. Westminster Seminary Press, 2017. Hardcover, 320 pages, \$22.50

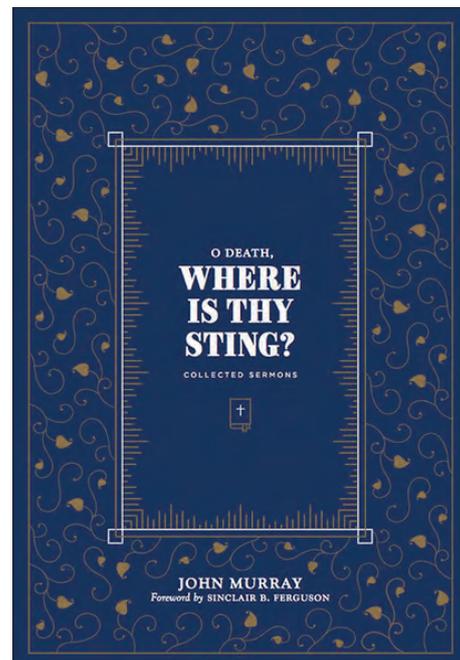
Reviewed by OP minister Arthur J. Fox

This book is a collection of sermons by Professor John Murray, the most esteemed professor of systematic theology during the formative years of Westminster Theological Seminary. It is almost impossible to adequately recommend this book. In the introduction, Scott Oliphint, one of Murray’s successors, notes that, “What must be highlighted here ... is that Murray was, throughout his adult life, bathed in the system of theology that finds its home in the Reformation” (xxx). This gives us a clue as to how we who preach or teach the Reformed faith might grow to maturity in Christ as Murray did: Let the message of the gospel have its full effect on our hearts so that we will, as another once put it, “Let the flag of the Reformed faith fly high.” The Reformed faith is a life commitment that cannot do its work without

a heart committed to it.

This volume contains fifteen eloquent gospel sermons and one charge to Dr. Edmund Clowney upon his installation as professor of practical theology, a position in which his specialty was to be homiletics. These sermons are full of grace and the gospel. They reflect the life of the preacher in that he was full of love for Christ and his gospel and for the people of God to whom he preached. The portrait (not included) that covered Murray’s collected works depicts a man with a solemn demeanor, but these sermons depict a man who rejoiced in his Savior and God and the privilege of preaching his Word. He clearly loved the congregations he preached to, as a result, when we read these transcripts, we cannot help sensing that love and joy, almost coming to feel that he would rejoice in our reading these sermons, and would plead with God to bring us afresh to the Christ he loved.

There is a fabulous bonus in almost every transcript here. Those who assembled this collection also blessed us with transcripts of John Murray’s prayers! They make for powerful reading. I found myself hoping that I could learn how to pray from this godly minister. For this gift to the church, I am thankful to Westminster Seminary Press and to



John Murray's son, Dr. Logan Murray, who granted Westminster permission to publish this material.

New Horizons, June 2018

The Christ of Wisdom: A Redemptive Historical Exploration of the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament

by O. Palmer Robertson.

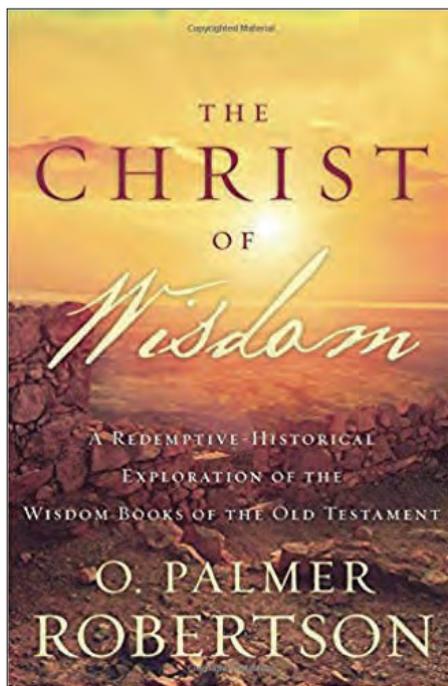
P&R, 2017. Paperback, 432 pages
\$15.00

**Reviewed by Peter Y. Lee,
OP minister and professor at
Reformed Theological Seminary in
Washington, DC**

This is a helpful book on the wisdom literature of the Old Testament by Dr. O. Palmer Robertson. It provides useful, and indeed often outstanding, commentary. For instance, Robertson offers a way to preach/teach Proverbs 10–31 by identifying wisdom themes (74–99) that can function as sermonic topics.

He also briefly comments on the relationship of biblical law and wisdom. This was insightful, and I would have appreciated further reflections on it. After all, no matter how helpful wisdom literature is, we still are unable to live wisely due to our fallen nature. Just as there is a three-fold use of the law, couldn't there also be a three-fold use of wisdom? He never presses this relationship, but his thoughts would have been valuable.

In Job, he points to the abundance of images in chapters 3–37 and the powerful way in which they are utilized to communicate the message of the book. He states, "Without the figures of speech, the whole piece of literature would fall flat. But with the images, the book comes to life" (139). As with his comments on Proverbs 10–31, this is helpful for preaching purposes.



In Lamentations, Robertson shows the interconnection between the outstanding literary form of the book (numerous acrostic poems) and its overall message. However, Robertson often equates the suffering of the city with the sufferings of Christ (298, 303). I wonder if this is a legitimate parallel, since Israel suffered due to their sins, while Christ did not. The former needed to repent, but not the latter.

Some of Robertson's thoughts on Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs were not persuasive to me. For example, he says the Song of Songs is not about Christ *per se*. Rather, it is about human love and the effects of Christ's redemptive work (334; 338–39). As true as this may be, it is a rather disappointing conclusion for a book that wants to focus on the Christ of Wisdom.

The most obvious weakness is that Robertson includes two books that are not traditionally examples of wisdom lit-

erature, namely Lamentations and the Song of Songs. He says that the wisdom books may be called the "how-to books" of the Old Testament. Thus, he offers the following summary for each book—Proverbs: How to Walk in Wisdom's Way; Job: How to Puzzle; Ecclesiastes: How to Cope with Life's Frustrations; Lamentations: How to Weep; Song of Songs: How to Love. His explanations for the inclusion of Lamentations and Song of Songs in this list is unpersuasive, even confusing. From this explanation, all Scripture could be understood as wisdom instruction. Any distinctive features of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes are now lost. Yet, given the insightful comments of Robertson, to have more from him is hardly a problem.

The greater weakness of the book is highlighted from its title, *The Christ of Wisdom: A Redemptive Historical Exploration of the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament*. When I saw this, I was very enthusiastic since there is a lack of redemptive historical and Christocentric treatments of the wisdom literature. But, disappointingly, the book was neither strongly Christocentric nor redemptive historical. Robertson says that redemptive history moves not only in a linear fashion but also cyclically. This cyclical pattern is found in the daily aspects of life: the cycle of daily sin, father-son relations, dialogue amongst friends, coping with frustrations of life, etc. (xvi–xvii). In essence, he redefines the term "redemptive history" and thus turns our attention from history to daily living.

For students looking for an innovative redemptive historical analysis (as it is traditionally defined), this book will be a disappointment. For pastors looking for preaching aids and traditional, conservative introductory discussions of wisdom literature, this book will be a benefit.
New Horizons, May 2018

Let us be jealous over our own conduct in the matter of observing the Sabbath. There is little danger of the day being kept too strictly in the present age. There is far more danger of it being profaned and forgotten entirely. J C Ryle

UN Committee says, “Right to Life” means “Right to Abortion”

By Stefano Gennarini, J.D. | November 8, 2018

NEW YORK, November 9 (C-Fam) The “right-to-life” clause in an important UN human rights treaty must now include a right to abortion. So says a committee of experts charged with monitoring compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which most states have ratified.

The committee says governments must decriminalize abortion in all circumstances and “remove existing barriers that deny effective access by women and girls to safe and legal abortion including barriers caused as a result of the exercise of conscientious objection by individual medical providers,” according to the committee which monitors the implementation of the UN treaty on civil and political rights, ratified by the United States in 1991.

“History will judge to what extent we have succeeded in rendering a normative statement for generations to come,” said Jerusalem-based law professor Yuval Shany as the committee adopted the legal commentary last week in Geneva.

Shany, who steered the drafting of the commentary described the general comment, as the document is known, as possessing a “deep humanitarian sensibility.”

In addition to decriminalizing abortion, the committee tries to impose an obligation on states to “provide safe, legal and effective access to abortion” any time a pregnancy might lead to “substantial pain or suffering.” The committee also promotes the notion that “termination of life” is a way to allow persons to “die with dignity” and an abolitionist approach to the death penalty.

All of the experts on the committee who took the floor praised Shany, describing the general comment as a watershed moment. Of the eighteen members of the committee, only one sounded a note of discord, and he was swiftly and harshly reprimanded by other members.

“This language will imply legalization

of abortion without restriction which in itself will deny the right to life of the unborn baby,” said Ambassador Ahmed Amin Fathalla somberly, the Chair of the committee.

He added, permitting abortion “with no criteria or restrictions or conditions” under the pretext of free choice and privacy would result in giving higher status to the right to personal autonomy than the right to life and that the committee’s approach “ignores all medical evidence” of when the life of a child might begin.

Fathalla’s intervention was made after he thought all other members of the committee who wanted to speak had an opportunity to do so. But as soon as Fathalla mentioned abortion other members angrily raised points of order to interrupt him.

“I don’t feel this is the time or place to give our subjective views and to criticize,” complained Tunisian professor Yadh Ben Achour.

“Perhaps this is not the right time,” said French legal scholar Olivier De Frouville.

Harshest of all, Sarah Cleveland, a U.S. law professor elevated to the committee by U.S. President Barak Obama, accused Fathalla and said he had “egregiously abused the spirit of this conversation and the position of chair.”

“I have the right to make a statement as a member of the committee,” Fathalla retorted, explaining that he expected his statement to be on the record of the general comment alongside all other opinions.

The general comment is the culmination of a four-year process. Over one hundred states and non-governmental organizations urged the committee not to interpret the UN civil and political rights treaty as requiring any changes to abortion laws, among these, the United States, Japan, Egypt, and Russia. It is not binding, though committee members like to describe their opinions as “authoritative.”

According to international experts who undersigned the San Jose Articles, there is no international right to abortion under any UN treaty, and when treaty bodies promote abortion as a right they do so

Jesus Christ reigns
as King of kings and
Lord of lords, and He
WILL have the victory
over those who oppose
Him. Continue to pray
for the advancement
of His kingdom and
righteousness.

illegally, and their actions cannot give rise to any new obligations.

One of the co-drafters and signers of the San Jose Articles, Director General of the European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) Gregor Puppink told the Friday Fax, “The Committee has clearly exceeded its mandate and violated the rules governing the fair interpretation of treaties in affirming that States parties should legalize abortion, and may permit assisted suicide. To infer rights to euthanasia and abortion from the right to life is contradictory and contradicts the intent of the Convention.”

Belarus renews pressure on Baptists after 10 years without conflict

December 13, 2017 By World Watch Monitor Belarus

Baptists in Vebel, north-eastern Belarus, have been detained and fined for singing songs and offering Christian books to passers-by in the market square, reports regional news agency Forum 18.

Two church members complained to the authorities at their treatment during their detention. Andrei Fokin sustained an injury to his face; the other church member said his hands went numb from handcuffs being put on too tightly.

Although churches should be registered with the state, like in many other former Soviet states, Baptists in Belarus refuse on principle, said Forum 18.

The Baptists in Vebel had enjoyed a long period without police harassment. The last time their activities attracted police attention was in 2004, when police detained Baptists who were running a street library.

Fokin could not explain why after so many years the police and courts had renewed pressure on the Baptist community.

"I've been conducting the street library ministry for 16 years, offering Bibles, children's literature and magazines for people to read and return," he told Forum 18. "Over the last 10 years we never had any conflicts."

'No better time' for growth of Christianity in Saudi Arabia

April 12, 2018 By World Watch Monitor

Emad Al Abdy, one of the leaders of the Saudi Christian Association, believes "there is no better time than now" for growth of Christianity in Saudi Arabia, despite the pressure on Christians, *Mission Network News* reports.

Al Abdy who was jailed in 2014 for becoming a Christian, said there is a "spiritual hunger" among Saudis.

"They're really seeking for peace, and they're really in big need to be served, and ... to help them," said Al Abdy. However, becoming a Christian in Saudi Arabia means "almost certain shunning and persecution by family, friends, and the government," he added.

The Saudi Christian Association was established by, and is run by, Saudi Christians. They believe that despite opposition from the government, Saudi people should have a choice to be Christian if they want.

Recently, during his first official trip abroad, the Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, visited the UK and had a meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. In the course of the meeting, the heir to the Saudi throne promised to promote inter-faith dialogue in his country as part of his wide-ranging programme of reforms.

At present, there are no church buildings in Saudi Arabia; Christian services

are held in secret places. Christians from Muslim backgrounds usually keep their faith hidden; several have been forced to leave the country after their newfound faith was discovered. Leaving Islam is technically punishable by death in Saudi Arabia, yet the number of Saudi Muslims becoming Christians is increasing, according to Christian charity *Open Doors International*.

Church leaders in Mexico face persecution

In Mexico, persecution against church leaders is on the rise. According to reports, recently, an assassin entered the home of a church leader, instructed him to kneel before him and pulled the trigger with the intent of killing him yet the weapon did not fire. Following this, the assailant robbed the pastor and left the house.

The assault came days after the attack on Eduardo Garcia, a local pastor who was pursued and shot by unidentified attackers believed to be individuals involved in the drug trade.

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John Chau's death was a missionary failure nobody should emulate

Recent news in the media concerning the death of missionary John Chau brings to light the reality that sometimes missionary endeavour is dangerous. We certainly ought to be saddened by the news of his death and the loss to his family.

There will be criticism to what has happened, possibly for quite some time to come. Some of it may be harsh and unwarranted.

Some of our readers may consider this article premature and even somewhat harsh in its assessment of the events that led to John Chau's demise.

However, it is not our intent to discourage anyone from going on missions, nor to be harsh. I would encourage those who desire to do so, to be fully prepared through a well structured and well formulated process which may be found in the Missions Policy Handbook prepared by the Overseas Mission Board of our churches.

The following article offers a clear, logical and convincing argument for full preparation for missionaries, churches and mission boards alike. Ed.

By Lyman Stone

Christian missionary work has been in the media's crosshairs recently thanks to the murder of John Chau, a young man hoping to spread the gospel to an isolated people group in the Indian Ocean. Many evangelical and Christian leaders have spoken up for Chau, identifying him as a martyr, as he was shot to death with arrows by the people he had hoped to evangelize.

Meanwhile, critics on the left have accused Chau of engaging in a colonialist project. This criticism has expanded in some cases to seemingly call all missionary work an inherently colonialist and exploitive project.

For orthodox Christians who hold to the revealed truth of scripture and believe in gospel-focused missions, this whole media circus is frustrating. The conservative media and the liberal media have both adopted wrong positions.

Did God give him a mission to the furthest place on earth?

First, some facts. Chau was a graduate of Oral Roberts University, a major institution in American evangelicalism. He was associated with and took a short training course from a missionary sending organization called All Nations, which has a fairly standard evangelical faith statement.

I've been unable to identify his exact denomination, but the public record is broadly consistent with a young man who possessed a fervent and basically orthodox faith. It is not clear if All Nations was

fully aware of Chau's intended strategy for his mission.

Indeed, Chau's plan was unusual. He had previously served in the mission field in Kurdistan leading evangelistic soccer camps, and similar work in South Africa. He was also a world-traveler and adventure tourist, partly paid for by a sponsorship deal with a beef jerky company and by travel-blogging.

With experience as an EMT, soccer coach, and social media marketer, Chau took a missionary training course from All Nations and headed to Sentinel Island, in the Indian Ocean. It appears he had learned about Sentinel Island on a previous adventure-tourism-evangelism trip to India.

Sentinel Island is one of the last "uncontacted" places on earth, and certainly the easiest one to reach. Most places in the world where there are still people totally isolated from modernity are deep in the Amazon or other jungles. Sentinel Island, however, is comparatively easy to reach by boat from India's Andaman Islands.

Of course, it isn't quite "uncontacted." In the 1880s, a British admiral, scientific pervert, and probable pedophile kidnapped then returned some of the children to the island some time later. It was *after* this traumatic experience, the first-ever documented contact between Sentinel Island and the outside world (and probably first substantial contact in at least 2,000 years based on linguistic evidence), that Sentinel Island seems to have turned aggressively inwards.

Since that expedition, virtually every person to set foot on Sentinel Island

has been killed by the locals, or barely escaped. Fishermen, naval helicopters, take your pick: the Sentinel Islanders were evidently so traumatized by their first encounter with the outside world that they decided to defend themselves aggressively. In other words, the Sentinel Islands are isolated *by choice*.

Chau, who did not speak any related local languages, had little substantive experience in the region, and whose main previous experience in mission work was soccer camps in Kurdistan and South Africa, believed he was the man to bring these people Jesus. He appears to have sincerely believed that God gave him specific instructions to evangelize the Sentinel Islanders.

This was despite his own awareness, according to his diary, that Sentinel Islanders were isolated by their own choice, that exposure to his germs could kill them, and that contacting them was basically a form of illegal immigration into an area India treats as a kind of independent country under its protection. Chau had to bribe some local fishermen to take him to the island.

Mission work is not an Instagram adventure

Chau was killed while serving as a missionary. But he was not killed on account of the gospel. He was killed on account of his unpreparedness. This may seem a harsh assessment, especially so soon after his death, but for the protection of the church's mission, it must be said.

It is vital that we understand what went wrong with Chau's mission, and what it says about mission work today. To do that, we can compare Chau's experience to a seminal event in the history of evangelical missionary efforts.

On January 8, 1956, five Christian missionaries were murdered in Ecuador. They were attempting to contact the Huaorani tribe, a violent, uncontacted people group. Their attempt ended in chests full of spearpoints. But their families did not abandon the project, and over the next few years, peaceful contact was made. Eventually, many of the tribe converted to Christianity and renounced violence.

The story was immortalized in Elizabeth Elliot's "Through Gates of Splendor," and in 2006 was made into a movie, "End of the Spear." These five missionaries were indeed martyred for their faith, and in circumstances that seem, on their surface, to be similar. Comparisons between Chau and these men have been rampant.

But Chau was not like these men. The five men had, between them, more than 15 years of experience working with various related people groups in Ecuador as missionaries. They had done thorough linguistic preparation, and could actually speak to the people they were hoping to evangelize to.

He recklessly endangered himself for a project he wasn't qualified for, and in the process endangered others.

They hadn't gone to missionary summer bootcamp: they were part of a disciplined set of institutions working in concert to evangelize the world, backed by a large network of supporters. So, when those five men died, there were other people around to take up the work and carry it over the finish line.

As best I can tell, while he was obviously well-intentioned, Chau was essentially a lone ranger, an Instagram-generation missionary. Far from having a fallback plan if he failed, Chau's expedition has gotten at least seven other people arrested, including, according to some accounts, another missionary in India. He recklessly endangered himself for a project he wasn't qualified for, and in the process endangered others.

Christian media figures have defended Chau as a sincere missionary: he was. Nothing can be said against his motives or the sincerity of his faith. Liberal critics have claimed he was a colonialist: he wasn't. He genuinely cared for the people he felt called to, and had no desire to dominate or control them.

But both sides miss a key point. It is deeply concerning that nobody who knew of Chau's plans, nobody in a position of influence at All Nations, ever told him the truth about his calling. A 27-year-old adventure junkie with an Instagram sponsorship, no experience in the work to be undertaken, very little formal training in any of the nuts-and-bolts of mission work, and no plan for long-term involvement in the culture, is unlikely to experience any kind of success.

It is deeply concerning that nobody who knew of Chau's plans, nobody in a position of influence at All Nations, ever told him the truth about his calling.

Again, the critique here is not about Chau's motives or character. I do not

dispute that he was genuinely motivated by a love for Christ and for the Sentinel Islanders. Rather, the critique is about evangelical institutions that catastrophically failed to guide and nurture Chau's zeal towards a more productive end.

For all that God sometimes works through unexpected means, the usual way that God accomplishes his work is through the mundane vocations of normal people. God heals diseases mostly through doctors, proclaims his word mostly through pastors, and reaches uncontacted people groups mostly through long-term missionaries doing years of advanced preparation in a variety of disciplines and skills.

The Kingdom of God is not a kingdom of lone wolves, but of sheep working as a team. Chau even wrote *in his journal* that he believed he was more use to God's kingdom alive: then islanders tried to kill him! He only survived during a previous encounter because the arrow they shot at him *hit his Bible instead*.

Making yourself a martyr isn't the goal

There's an old pastoral joke about a flood coming and a man prays for God to save him. The waters began to rise, and a neighbor with a Jeep comes over and offers him a ride out. The man answers, "No, God will save me."

A few hours later the waters rise more and a man with a boat comes by, offering to get the man out. He replies, "No, God will save me." Hours later, the water had risen so much that he had to get on his roof. A life jacket floated by, but he didn't reach for it, saying to himself, "God will save me!"

Of course, the man drowned. In heaven, he asked God, "Why didn't you save me?" And God of course answered, "I sent you a Jeep, a boat, and a life jacket!"

Somebody, whether a pastor, a teacher, or someone else, shirked his job to tell Chau that his mission wasn't to the Sentinel Islands, but to all the other people God had put in his life.

Chau's story is a sad one. He was, from all appearances, a faithful Christian, passionate about spreading the gospel, but somewhere along the way someone misled him about how to do it. They allowed him to become convinced that his vocation was in a place where he

had none of the requisite skills for the work, instead of through more plausible channels: his travel writing, his connections in the outdoors industry, his family, his soccer coaching.

Somebody, whether a pastor, a teacher, or someone else, shirked his job to tell Chau that his mission wasn't to the Sentinel Islands, but to all the other people God had put in his life. As harsh as it may be to say this mere days after his death, before his body has even been recovered, still it must be said: he had no business being on Sentinel Island.

A month previously, according to his Instagram account, he'd been faithfully pursuing his missional calling with soccer camps in South Africa: he should have stayed there, where he had the right skills to do the work of the kingdom. But again, it's not Chau I mostly blame here: it's all the people who could have told him to stay in South Africa, and apparently didn't, or didn't do anything to interdict his quest.

Young men on well-intentioned but misguided adventures are a constant through time. The specific failure here isn't Chau's recklessness, but the recklessness of evangelical culture and institutions that aided and abetted rather than counseling and directing.

Mission work is important, so do it well

In his epistles, Paul often raises the issue of not embarrassing the work of the church. We are supposed to do no wrong in the eyes of anyone; to be a Jew to the Jews and a Roman to the Romans and a Greek to the Greeks. We are supposed to be diligent stewards of the good name of Christ.

This whole escapade with Chau, unfortunately, serves to obscure a key fact about mission work: not only is it good for the kingdom of God, it's good in a very earthly sense as well. A growing body of academic literature, even from secular, progressive researchers, has found that historical missionary activity has large, positive effects on societies receiving missionaries.

Mission work isn't just walking into a village, proclaiming the name of Jesus, and having people line up for baptism.

After hundreds of years, the positive effects of Jesuit missionaries in Brazil can still be detected in the data. Missionary

work in Benin created positive effects more than a century later. There are numerous other examples, but the point is: while colonial governments did horrible things to dominated peoples, missionary work tended to be the least-bad part of that, and sometimes genuinely good.

The reason for this is that, far from what some modern evangelicals might imagine, mission work isn't just walking into a village, proclaiming the name of Jesus, and having people line up for baptism. For every person a missionary tells about Jesus, there will be 100 people they tell about how to shape their tongue to pronounce the English-language sound "th" as in "theatre."

For every baptism, there will be 500 root canals or eyeglass fittings. For every conversion, there will be weeks of lesson-planning, learning the local language, translating documents, working with locals to develop a writing system for a rare language, and other similar tasks.

Throughout Christian history, missionaries have spent as much time tentmaking as teaching. This is as it should be: daily work is a vital part of human life, a vital way we connect to each other, and a way we build relationships. By spending years working together, sharing life together, long-term, committed missionaries don't just get people to sign their name on the dotted line as a Christian, they help build new communities of faith and practice, enable economic advancement of locals, and alleviate pressing social ills.

Doing missions poorly doesn't glorify God

Unfortunately, modern American conceptions of mission work are dominated by short-term trips that often look as much like vacations as they do useful service. American churches are increasingly keen to support missionaries who do less of the hard work of integrating into communities and building relationships, in favor of charismatic parachute-preachers.

American churches are increasingly keen to support charismatic parachute-preachers.

Chau is *not* emblematic of how mission activity has historically proceeded but, sadly, his approach, disconnected from any rational assessment of vocation, untethered from durable community roots, decontextualized and nomadic like an Instagram travel blog account, may be what much Christian mission work looks

like in the future. That is, unless Christian churches push back against that trend, and demand of mission-sending organizations that they have realistic plans for how missionaries will be engaged in a materially productive relationship with their local community.

The church must guard vigilantly against a future where "mission work" is simply a Christian sub-genre of travel blogging and adventure tourism. Even when well-intentioned, as Chau's mission clearly was, the fusion between status-symbol adventure tourism and mission work will inevitably have bad consequences for the church.

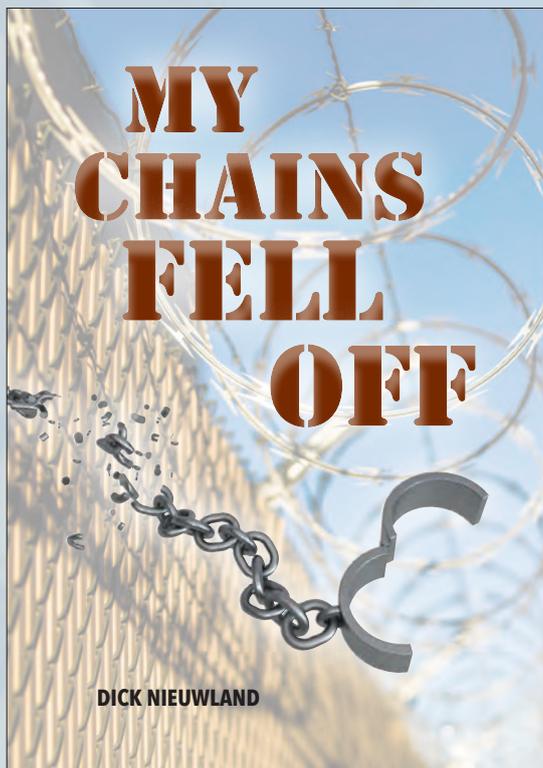
That future is fast-approaching, and will be hastened by the hagiography about Chau. The man was sincere, well-intentioned, and faithful, but he was a victim of a moral failure of evangelical institutions who have taught a generation of young Christians a long list of falsehoods about how mission work is supposed to happen.

We should not revile Chau, as the left is doing, nor saint him, as some on the right are: rather, we should mourn that a life that promised such faithful service for many years to come was ripped from its vocation by a lack of good pastoral counsel.

Lyman Stone is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Family Studies, and an Advisor at the consulting firm Demographic Intelligence. He and his wife serve as missionaries in the Lutheran Church-Hong Kong Synod.

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Book Review:

My Chains fell off

Reviewing this book is timely. Now in its third publication, it is proving to be an invaluable resource to our prison ministry teams. It is a book that every ministry team should have available to its team leaders. For the reviewer, it's a privilege to write this review, firstly because the author is well known to me, and secondly because I have seen and heard the messages of this book presented from the day they were conceived by the author. I can picture him, working in his orchard, while pruning, while thinning, while picking, working on the next message he was to present to inmates at Hawkes Bay Prison. Imagine the sun-soaked apple orchard, neat rows of apple varieties, just 5 kms from the razor wire and walls of the prison, with its 600+ inmates.

Those first visits to the prison in 2003 were daunting for most of us. High walls and razor-sharp

wire were just physical distractions. The inmates were led out to "Church" up to twenty at a time in the large outdoor exercise area, many sat quietly on the asphalt, others just paced the walls listening with one ear.

The message was always the same he would say to us. But he brought the Gospel, from a new angle, a simple message that each listener could relate to, whether it be creation's order, or man's lostness or sins destructive power – and then, Jesus speaks, God's plan of salvation comes into focus, then restoration and the call to faith and trust in our Saviour. The messages in this book are aimed at inmates, they often use the language spoken by these men confined to the walls around them and trapped in the consequences of their actions. They are messages of love, God's love, they are aimed at the heart. Often, they start with a question: Who am I?, What is truth?, What are you doing here? Ten to fifteen minutes is the average reading time.

Well known Bible characters are brought into the messages as examples of faith in trying circumstances, the futility of sinful extravagance, and the chasing of wealth or revenge are often used to expose common human tendencies. One message entitled "Nobody is telling me what to do" sums up how the author at times confronts his audience....

"Guys, come to your senses, all of us should look at ourselves sometimes, we should ask ourselves the question, who are we? Who are you? Did you make yourself? You are a creature, aren't you? You are made by God. He owns you. You are His. He is your maker and He tells you what to do. But you are not taking that lying down are you? You have

decided that if you want to, you will disagree with God, are you sure? Well, guys, the only thing I can say is go ahead and do it. Go ahead and shake your fist at God, you tell God where to go, you tell God to get out of your life, you can do that, it is possible. You don't have to come back next Sunday. Yes, you can do that. But I tell you, that you will do that to your everlasting regret. If you do that, tell God where to go, you will regret it for all eternity, forever and forever." Then, as in every message, the Gospel is pressed home "Guys, you don't have to go that way, there is another way..."

The 35 messages in this book can also be used as devotional reading. The messages are always for those who are at a point in life where a reality check is needed. Inmates who were occasionally questioned, were often struck as to the severity of their situation, and their deep need to find a better way to live. Lord willing these messages were used by our Lord to begin a life of faith in the Saviour, whom they could find in prayer, and repentance, in their cell, at any time. The urgency of this is pressed home.

These days, the wardens limit the "church" group sizes. As always, the presentation of the message is accompanied by singing, Bible reading and prayer. Earnest worship is the focus, God speaking to the assembled sinners, who respond in prayer and song. Some who come to church know, they are in the presence of a holy God. Most keep silence, yet others, we can see clearly, are firmly under the power of the evil one. This book comes highly recommended by our three prison ministry teams.

John Verbokkem

Price, includes postage: **NZ \$10.**

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For Australia: includes postage \$16 NZ.

For more information and orders, please contact:
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