

COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus: God's Blessing or Satan's Curse?

This is entirely the position of the author and is not endorsed by any ministries or individuals mentioned within it.

The central thesis of this essay, expressed in the words I wrote to the most senior prophet I know (who has international recognition), is expressed in these words, "*It is time to evict this virus rather than celebrate it as some kind of global reset*" to which their reply was "*Yes and amen.*" Hopefully, you can now read the rest of the essay in good conscience. These words were actually written from me to them in congratulation to them for a five minute video presentation as a Passover message¹ in which they had used the eviction motif, but, combined with some messages I have watched from Jennifer LeClaire, Kenneth Copeland and Jesse Duplantis, it was sufficient for me to be emboldened to write this without being concerned I am rebellious and partnering with the satanic².

My point of departure that motivates this essay is that the multitude and diversity of prophetic voices with their incommensurate positions, conflicting "words" and the massive vacillation within the church of how to respond to COVID-19, is indicative of the failure to resolve the most basic question of all:

1. "*Is this a grand Satanic move that should be resisted by every believer in every way possible with all of the resources at our disposal*"

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=537607370292333>

² As far as the spiritual merits of the case I argue, I will leave it to those with the gift of the discernment of spirits as to whether I am in rebellion or my own "Word of Faith" prejudice has simply blinded me to the new and better wine.

2. *“Is this a grand reset of God, where He has stripped away everything that matters to us and that we should somehow reposition ourselves for a new normal...”*

3. *“Is this both”*

Giving a definitive, clear and well-argued answer to this question I believe is imperative and possible and this is what this essay is about.

The reason why this has presented itself before me in such a way it has provoked me to write about it, was that recently, during a mentoring session for a prophetic training course, the presenter made the statement (or something very like it), *“All of us prophesy according to our worldview. You will never prophesy contrary to what you believe about eschatology”*. As you can gather from their response, the question was with reference to a basic eschatological perspective and how it informs what we can bring to the prophetic table:

- a. If you believe that Novel Coronavirus COVID-19 is one of the plagues of the Book of Revelation, you are getting very excited and Jesus is about to return - it is trivial to find this position in the Christian blogosphere and social media³.
- b. If you believe that many things remain undone and Jesus’ return is not imminent then you require a different explanation.

³ Though we will intersect occasionally with this position during this essay, I do not engage extensively with it for I believe it to be fundamentally mistaken and if you are prophetic I refer you to Bill Hamon, *Prophetic Scriptures Yet to Be Fulfilled: During the 3rd and Final Reformation*, Kindle Ed. (Destiny Image: 2011) for the full rebuttal of that position. I do offer a brief dismissal of it here <https://medium.com/@mmacneill123/is-covid-19-a-sign-of-jesus-imminent-return-and-the-rapture-of-the-church-63efd36e24e7> and an extensive, academic one as part of a dissertation https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325807525_Dominion_Theology_-_Its_origin_development_and_place_in_Christian_thinking, especially chapter 2 that focusses on eschatological views.

However, on accepting (b), just because you require a *different* explanation does not mean that there are still not varieties of *possible* explanations to answer that question, implying that we are answering the more fundamental question in different and contradictory ways. It is not that this diversity of opinion is a bad thing in itself, for I, with the great neo-Calvinist Abraham Kuyper, want to recognise pluralism of religious and spiritual opinion as a good thing^{4,5}. We must also recognise that the discussion for those of us humble enough to embrace the diversity within the viewpoints might also help us to come to a more robust and correct position ourselves. Kuyper identified diversity as a true attribute of something being alive, it reflects the freedom and liberty granted to the believer⁶ and we should, in one sense, welcome the current discussion and divergence of views amongst us as prophets *if for no other reason than it showcases our total failure to arrive at a coherent position about it*. For Kuyper, his important qualification to pluralism was that it is *only* if that opinion remains orthodox, which for the Calvinist is always within the revealed Law of God in his covenants. Similarly, I believe if we can answer our basic question deciding the responsibility for this event, we can come to a coherent and unified position about it. Thus, the presenter's answer was an accurate but incomplete and partial response to a probing question from the student who also happened to be

⁴ See for example, Kuyper, A., 'Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life' and 'Calvinism: Source and Stronghold of Our Constitutional Liberties' in Abraham Kuyper – A Centennial Reader, Ed. James D. Bratt (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1998)

⁵ For Kuyper, this contrasted with the papal top-down approach to dogma in which the Pope issues bulls that settles a matter of dispute for he is the authoritative *Pontifex Maximus*. As Ulf Eckman (worthy of recognition for establishing one of the great churches of the Earth in Sweden), as a recent convert from Protestantism states, the Pope has received the answer from God directly and carries God's authority. Thus, in the case of you being an anxious Catholic reader, you can perhaps wait for the next papal bull on Coronavirus (or similar) and skip the reading this essay. Modern, shallow Protestants can do a similar thing and wait for their favourite magazine to do a feature article (they are already appearing) and take a position from their favourite Christian publication and/or senior prophet. Unfortunately, if you are a thinking Protestant, you might have to endure the reading of this essay.

⁶ Exposed in book length by Martyn Lloyd Jones, D., *Liberty and Conscience – Romans 14: 1-17* (Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh: 2015)

from a different nation whose prophets had generated multiple and incommensurate answers which implied they had answered in different ways, consciously or unconsciously, that most basic and fundamental question. By properly giving an answer to the more basic question, we can remove the confusion and give a definitive answer to the student's question and our dilemma as to whether this is God or Satan.

Thus, to begin our analysis, consider what Chuck Pierce, credited with the only 'before the event'⁷ prophetic word regarding COVID-19, says:

*"Several interpretations could be given over the situation of COVID-19 as havoc occurs throughout the nations. Some would even say that this virus has stopped any movement where revival can continue. I would say: "God has put a pause until He sees who is willing to cross over with Him through His blood at Passover." This Passover will become a dividing line for our future!"*⁸ (emphasis added)

Chuck is one of the prophetic generals and we should honour him for being accurate in this matter. However, he also reveals the problem I want to examine here, it is this phrase "*several interpretations*". Now that he has been vindicated (after the cool reception of his initial word), he has obviously been sought after and interviewed but His subsequent words on this matter regarding this year⁹ and what is going to happen were sufficiently ambiguous (or multivalent to be kinder) that whatever does

⁷ As I mention elsewhere, there are plenty of prophets attempting to "back-fix" their words to validate their status and, of course, we have a vast outpouring of new words post the event which has created this noise and confusion I am writing about here. The question asked by the student was regarding the clear division between words that reflected the eschatology of the prophet (implying one or the other of our positions 1-3) and what did the presenter (probably the most senior British prophetic voice) think about it.

⁸ <https://www.charismanews.com/opinion/80444-chuck-pierce-prophecies-massive-plague-like-invasion-will-test-us-through-passover> , accessed 09/04/2020

⁹ https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/cwn/2020/april/chuck-pierce-propheied-last-year-about-the-coming-plague-he-says-this-passover-will-be-a-true-passover?cid=EU_CBNNEWS-20200408-PROD_DM45221&bid=939780116&inid=A1D42996-BAC2-49F9-8D2A-2340D7A82980 , accessed 09/04/2020

happen can be pushed into the hole that has been dug (for or by him). Chuck is not alone here, there are all sorts of shades of prophetic opinion and nuancing of just what is going to happen economically and politically between the US and China for example, we are at a watershed moment etc, but very little precision. This is important because, and this is *my* main qualification to the diversity paradigm, we must recognise that not *all* our views are *equally as valid* as each other, not least because of their theological conclusions and their practical implications. It is imperative, which was also recognised by the presenter, that “*we are speaking with one voice*”¹⁰. We still need to have the courage to argue a position about our faith if we believe that what is being taught is not fully consistent with scripture or is even fundamentally opposed to it (as Kuyper often did with exquisite brilliance). *Some* theological positions *are better* than others; in the sense of being more faithful to the letter and spirit of the biblical text, are the substantively correct *interpretation* (that word again) of scripture and are able to give a coherent account of reality and to inform our praxis.

It should be apparent from my extended introduction here that this question has the potential to get complex rapidly being a confluence of so much theology and philosophy, so I will be straightforward as to why I want to consider this question. My current mentors in the prophetic, who have run an excellent series of courses in the last two years for those of us worldwide who feel called into the prophetic office,

¹⁰ This, of course, begs the question as to why I did not speak up immediately when invited by the presenter “is there anyone who wants to disagree, we need to hear from you”. Briefly, I did not believe it was appropriate to at that point in that setting with no preparation where it is more likely to be disruptive rather than helpful and I was more than happy to listen to the contrary view to my own instinctive one. However, this essay does represent me “speaking up” in a non-trivial way and in what I hope to be a useful contribution.

argue strongly and urgently for positions (2) and sometimes imply (3) if I am understanding the mentoring call I was involved in and the sequence of meetings that have been streamed daily for a general audience since the COVID-19 outbreak locked us all inside. Their message is clear and unapologetic regarding the situation the world finds itself in, "*it is an outstanding display of God's sovereignty*" and we are counselled to get into the timings and purposes of God at this time.

However, I, without ill-will or prejudice¹¹ will argue for position (1) in an equally clear and unapologetic fashion because I do believe that to take position (2) or (3) is such a basic confusion and has such serious consequences for our conception of the character of God, that it needs to be challenged. Of course, it could be argued that our high-level conceptions of God's character are abstract, and it is the low-level phenomenological outworking of our theology that matters. Our theology should not get in the way of us as believers being able to work together and embrace our diversity as in the case of George Whitfield and John Wesley who had radically divergent views but could still preach the gospel together¹². As a general pragmatic principle, I am prepared to accept that, but Christians need to have a robust answer to those who ask them difficult questions about God's character and more pertinently about where God in relation to this and similar events sits. This essay wants to wrestle with those difficult questions for those who think it matters that we should have as correct and full conception of God's character as possible. If Jesus is the Truth and Jesus draws all humanity to himself as he is lifted up¹³, it is Truth that

¹¹ As scripture makes clear, it is not for me to judge "another man's servant" (Rom 14:10) for they stand before God on their own merits.

¹² At least for a time but they eventually separated with Whitfield heading for the New World. Paul and Barnabas could not resolve differences and also eventually separated.

¹³ John 12:32

draws all humanity to God and so it is important we can present an accurate picture of Jesus and thus God's character to the world.

Of course, in some respects we are immediately getting right down to what we think scripture *is* and how it dovetails with our prophetic and seer anointings. If we believe scripture to be a public, eternal, objective statement of God's law from which we can derive a systematic theology and practical ethics, constraining the spirits (thus the mouths) of the prophets within clear boundaries, we will approach it very differently than if we consider it a deliberately ambiguous narrative that invites a plurality of possible meanings and consequences. In such a view, we see scripture primarily as a narrative text that is reinterpreted for each age according to what that age needs, full of mysteries that can only be revealed by inspiration of the Spirit within the prophets, for "*the letter kills but the Spirit brings life*"¹⁴; and part of the genius of God is that it is the timeless truth, but it is applied situationally and creatively to a time or culture. On this latter view, it would even be an error to claim semantic persistence and objective clarity, its beauty is its amorphous, opaque subjectivity and its transrational revelatory route to knowledge. In other words, expanding slightly on what the presenter accurately stated in the answer to the student, we are really dealing with basic philosophical *worldviews* with differing theological hermeneutics. A "worldview" is a set of presuppositions against which all else is judged. We are identifying the cognitive presuppositions built into our processing of the event that arrives for processing via our physical or spiritual¹⁵

¹⁴ 2Co 3:6

¹⁵ If we really do "prophesy according to our worldview" it does not matter whether that inspiration originates from the spiritual, the soulful or the natural world, we still work it over in our minds and understanding "as we prophesy in part" (1Co 13:9) the exception being when God takes over our

senses. Other words that might be used are ethical framework, or very popular in prophetic circles, “a paradigm”. When we talk about someone “*looking through rose-tinted glasses*” we are also talking hermeneutics, it is what makes sense of an event that otherwise remains ambiguous when considered in isolation.

I would conclude that the first position regarding scripture is really the philosophical position of Reformed Theology that argued for a coherent, systematic theology and the latter is a reflection of our contemporary, postmodern milieu where we have subjectivised theology (“what do *I* think is right?”), relativised religious experience (“this is what *I* have *experienced* and therefore it is *equally as valid* as what *you* experienced”) and are disposed to situational (as opposed to normative), mystical, transrational ethical positions (claiming authority and insight from beyond the rational about how we should live). The confidence of the Reformation as one arm of the Renaissance (the Christian Enlightenment) was the presupposition of “modern” philosophy¹⁶ that reason with the addition of the restoring grace of God could assemble an accurate picture of reality¹⁷. As time passed, confidence in reason was confined to the natural realm alone, it could tell us something about the phenomena of the world but the not the world as it really is (or the supernatural world)¹⁸. Reason then dismissed the supernatural world as unknowable and faith, if

mouth and we say something totally beyond our understanding. In such cases, it can be completely contrary to our worldview and we need another essay to discuss such cases.

¹⁶ “Modern” philosophy placed the theory of knowledge (how do I know) rather than metaphysical questions (does God exist, do particulars and universals exist, what is the nature of nature, etc.) at the heart of philosophy. Although Descartes (c.1620) is often thought of as the first modern philosopher, Calvin shared this modern premise that knowledge of ourselves and God precedes metaphysical speculation about the nature of reality. He is philosophically “modern” in that sense.

¹⁷ Where Christian and non-Christian modern philosophy differed was that Reformed Christians recognised the cognitive degradation as the results of the fall. Reason was not un-aided as for the non-Christians, but the operation of God’s common grace allows humanity to acquire knowledge of the world both by the Christian and non-Christian.

¹⁸ This is the position associated with Immanuel Kant (c.1788) who defined the subsequent programme of philosophy (and much theology) with reactions, both positive and negative, to his

a place was left for it was mystical and arational. Then reason defeated itself¹⁹ and by the time of “postmodern” philosophy that has characterised philosophy since the closing decades of the 20th century, any claim to certainty is considered as presumptuous and arrogant; it is actually sceptical we can know anything in an absolute sense and therefore promotes a “diversity” of possible answers as, at best, “provisionally correct”. Our penchant for diversity in theological matters is really a reflection of our infatuation with the postmodern worldview that “gave space to the sacred” after we were shut out in the cold during the barren years of Darwinism, but being just one of many ways to view the world also makes it difficult to argue for Christianity as correct²⁰. The position I am taking is very un-postmodern and dogmatic in that it argues that scripture is normative for us rather than something we interpret according to our situation; we can take it at face value and authoritative without a scaffolding of elaborate hermeneutics that adapt it to our time²¹.

So, let me summarise the position that implies argument (2) as faithfully as I can from these sources²² which I recommend you watch to get a feel that this is a

philosophy. Only with the rise of scientific naturalism during the second half of the 20th century do we finally see his influence wane.

¹⁹ Hume D., *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Hafner, New York:1948 (1764)), p. 10

²⁰ See <https://planetmacneil.org/Documents/Content/PostModernChristian2007.htm> for my first short essay on this subject written as part of my BD.

²¹ This is not to deny the practice and usefulness of hermeneutics but an appeal to the hermeneutics of the Reformation: *sola scriptura* (scripture alone), *sola fide* (by faith alone), *sola gratia* (by faith alone), *sola Christo* (through Christ alone), *sola Deo gloria* (glory to God alone) and *tota scriptura* (the whole of scripture). We might also reflect on Wesleyan *prima scriptura* (scripture first) which was a modification where Sacred Tradition, Reason, and Experience are sources of Christian theology, but are subordinate to Sacred Scripture. This is because Wesley wanted to emphasise that Christianity was not just an acceptance of ideas, but someone should also be a Christian in their lifestyle.

²² https://7mu.com/blog/do-you-know-what-god-is-saying-prophetic-report-with-lance-wallnau-larry-sparks/?inf_contact_key=33af93f318ca7680c8623f454dfbec3d842e902fbefb79ab9abae13bfc46658; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EulfcMCHTZ0> . Both of these feature Lance Wallnau in discussion, there is much to commend in both these interviews with which I wholeheartedly agree and Larry Sparks in the first one, like me, makes the excellent observation there is no coherence from the “prophetic” church as regarding what is going on but he does identify three basic positions with which I interact in the main text. Mario Murillo is the second one is an all-out confrontation with the “seeker-friendly” church culture and advocates the rediscovery of the primitive “worldview collisions” (severely

substantive and serious position, held by senior prophetic voices. This is necessarily a compression of hours of material, but I hope it captures the salient points:

“We will really miss what and oppose what God is doing in this new wine time, during the Passover celebrated with us all in our homes like they were in the first Passover in Egypt, if we fail to embrace the reset. God is judging the gods of Egypt which we have been worshipping in our comfort. As in Haggai we have been about our own projects and ignoring His. God has put us in this place, stripped us of all our idols and support structures and wants us to embrace a new way of doing church. He is bored with our Laodicean lukewarm character and has spat us out of His mouth. His goodness is manifested in His severity, our human conception of goodness does not capture this ferocious, passionate judgment of God²³. We need to trust our loving Father and into His hands commit our spirits during this time. Under no circumstances should we resist our social situation we find ourselves in but rather adapt to it. It is not helpful to ask the ‘why’ this happened but only how are we going to respond positively to this now.”²⁴

The position that implies argument (3):

This desires to preserve God’s basic character and reputation without accepting this necessarily implies acceptance of argument (1). It wants to maintain the position that “God is good and just *all* the time”²⁵ but needs to

confrontational) approach to evangelism with which I could not be more in agreement with. Also watch Glasgow Prophetic Centres’ ‘Power Hour’ series (especially episodes 1-5) on their You-Tube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLhuX7u3cX-i11cuSvzw89w>, which states very clearly the contrary position to what I argue here but which also provides a lot of sound guidance and wisdom regarding what to do in the situation we find ourselves in.

²³ This I believe is where we require the mitigation from position (3).

²⁴ Contra my position as expressed here: <https://medium.com/@mmacneill123/should-i-obey-my-government-on-civil-disobedience-and-the-covid-19-novel-coronavirus-74c944588dec>

²⁵ Bill Johnson, *God is Good: He’s Better Than You Think*, Kindle Ed. (Destiny Image: 2016)

excuse Him from the consequences and collateral damage by reference to His *permissive*, as opposed to causative, will. That is, exonerate Him from direct responsibility for the economic collapse, mass misery and suffering of actions that He allowed because He has a loving purpose for our reformation in our suffering, viz. “the patience of Job”²⁶. In one way or another, we have brought this on ourselves.

So, let me begin my arguments for position 1 and I will then argue that taking this position renders the other two position untenable. For me, the “plumb lines” of scripture are many but I want to consider primarily John 10:10 and briefly visit Isaiah 54:15-17:

^{NET} **John 10:10** The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.

^{NET} **Isaiah 54:15-17** ¹⁵ If anyone dares to challenge you, it will not be my doing! Whoever tries to challenge you will be defeated. ¹⁶ Look, I create the craftsman, who fans the coals into a fire and forges a weapon. I create the destroyer so he might devastate. ¹⁷ No weapon forged to be used against you will succeed; you will refute everyone who tries to accuse you. This is what the LORD will do for his servants – I will vindicate them," says the LORD.

Now, these verses have a context, and much can be said and has been said in their exegesis and applicability. However, in an unambiguous and clear way, I believe they express some very clear universal and eternal principles which should give us a general orientation towards what we are experiencing in the world today and for us not to get confused by obtuse and sophisticated prophetic inferences from extended biblical passages freshly baptised with our new Western prophetic insights. As a matter of exegetical clarity, I would immediately say that the context of John 10:10 is

²⁶ Jam 5:11

as a summary statement of theological arguments that have gone on for chapters and chapters and are illustrated further afterwards. It presents to us the clearest distinction between the character and purposes of God and the character and purposes of Satan in the whole of scripture.

John 10:10 is unambiguous in what it sets before us. The mood of the Greek is subjunctive, and the construction is logically emphatic negative emphasising the absolute contrast between Jesus, representing the person and character of God and the thief, representing the person and character of Satan²⁷ and the objects of their purposes are ourselves. What does the Satan come to do to us? To *steal*, to *kill* and to *destroy*. What does God come to do to us? To *bring life* and to have it *abundantly*. So, freshly armed with this principle, let us apply it directly to what confronts the world. Do we have stealing, killing and destroying in our world today as the result of the pandemic we are experiencing?

- Well, our liberty has been stolen²⁸ on the back of poor science²⁹ by crooked politicians behaving like Eastern European communist dictatorships did during the height of the Cold War.

²⁷ I choose to follow the normal rule of English grammar which is to capitalise proper names. This does not imply I am providing special honour to the person of Satan or granting him equivalent rank with God.

²⁸ I write polemically about this here <https://medium.com/@mmacneill123/coronavirus-duplicity-what-the-politicians-and-experts-are-doing-behind-your-back-465937458640> and here <https://medium.com/@mmacneill123/corona-covid-19-hoax-much-more-than-meets-the-eye-6e026019a5bf>

²⁹ The first major contra-study has been published in the premium medical peer reviewed journal ('the Lancet'), see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-52180783> . Its conclusion was that there was no justification for closing schools (and by implication most "social distancing" and stopping the economy). It has been well-received by most experts, the notable exception being the professor who provided the report to the government that was used to lock us up. However, even he has been forced to admit that there could be "as much as a 2/3rds overlap" between people who would have died anyway and people dying from COVID-19; if the original "research" had been subject to robust peer review, we would probably have never got to lockdown.

- Our rights to travel, trade freely with one another, to socialise and to meet as church congregations have all been removed with a massive and intrusive increase in police powers and the surveillance capabilities granted to government agencies.
- 342 pages of legislation that is unprecedented in peacetime was “nodded through” the British parliament that overturns all kinds of precedents that preserve our liberty and freedom.
- Data that we believed was going to be private (our cell-phone data and even our “Fitbits”) is now going to be made available so that “contact tracking” can be done³⁰. The privacy controls will be easily bypassed³¹ so that individuals and their location will be available to any agency.
- There is plenty of killing going on, particularly of those with existing health conditions.
 - It disproportionately affects the economically disadvantaged, the self-employed, urban areas with high density, close proximity housing, the elderly and those with special educational needs or care needs that are likely to be institutionalised.
 - Human beings are social creatures and not all are online or will be able to remain socially stable if they are limited to online communication.
- The prize, however, must go to *destroying*.
 - Tens of millions have lost their livelihoods, work and businesses.

³⁰ See for example <https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2020/04/apple-and-google-detail-bold-and-ambitious-plan-to-track-covid-19-at-scale/>

³¹ Consider, for example, data identifies subjects regularly travelling from infected area X to uninfected area Y. How long will it be before a government agency requests identification of the “anonymous” subject that is posing a risk to the general population?

- Entire economies of nations have been stopped and massive borrowing by their governments is going to concentrate an enormous amount of power in a transnational financial elite³², probably for decades to come³³.
- Borrowing will create inflationary pressure destroying investments, pensions and making it difficult for people to buy property.
- Abuse victims (both child and spousal) are trapped inside with their abusers.
- People’s mental health and overall sense of well-being is being compromised by unnatural and unnecessary³⁴ incarceration.

So, I would hope, at least on a *prima facie* basis anyway, we should be able to emphatically answer our basic question that the worldwide shutdown and pestilence is the work of Satan in response to the progress of the Kingdom on Earth.

Why would I be asserting that there was a “*progress of the Kingdom on Earth*” when the very terms of position 2 and so much of the prophetic voices are in terms of the “reset” being a symptom of God “spewing us out of his mouth” (Rev 3:16)? This “prophetic” spiritual explanation is rather that our lack of Christian fidelity and formulaic praxis with which He was totally bored caused this event to happen. Our

³² Howard-Brown, R., Williams, P.L., *Killing the Planet – How a Financial Cartel Doomed Mankind* (Republic Book Publishers, Alexandria: 2019)

³³ It may be the world economy never recovers and a new form of social organisation emerges where we are provided with a minimal State subsidy that ensures equality by imposition (a Universal Basic Income). This is already a serious policy proposal and many British labour unions have already passed resolutions at national conferences backing such schemes that “liberate” workers from bondage to work. British pressure group *38 Degrees* which now has a national level voice, launched a petition at the beginning of the crisis advocating this policy.

³⁴ See for example: <https://heated.medium.com/how-should-we-be-reacting-to-the-coronavirus-pandemic-7b3189b1097b> This was written by a senior medical figure with experience of handling epidemics.

imperative is now to embrace the new normal rather than to reflect on why it happened for this is our new reality. However, among the more thoughtful prophets there has still been the need to address this “why” question but to me, the quick reference to a passage or two from Hosea and Haggai in answering the “why did this happen” answers the question in an entirely inadequate way. It is not difficult to use the narrative of scripture to construct a case that fits a scenario simply because the scenarios within scripture cover most of human experience. Rather, it is a historical cliché but if we do not learn the lessons of history, we are doomed to repeat them. This was not just a *spiritual* event, wicked men inspired and controlled by Satan created and released it into the world with malicious intent because of godless socio-political structures and they have an on-going ideological commitment to a socialist new world order where every detail of our life down to our precise GPS location is tracked and our transactions are all conducted electronically, enabling complete and absolute control to be exercised in the name of social solidarity. If we meekly accept our imprisonment and concentrate on what we consider the new spiritual dynamics without comprehending our global historical context and our relationship to the economic and political spheres, we will be prophetically navel-gazing whilst a social and political revolution takes place that robs us of our freedom, *permanently*. This is not to deny that we can do healthy self-examination and reform our spiritual lives where we have got lazy during this time and to receive the ministry from those who have their gifts of exhortation, prophetic wisdom and apostolic mission. It might even be that an extended period of incarceration leads us to have great power and anointing as the underground internet church as the Chinese have shown us over the decades with their profound holiness and purity in suffering. However, as I have

written elsewhere³⁵, an online life means a government can turn you offline very quickly and as the present experience of Chinese Christians also shows, with a slight shift in the regime of toleration, the bulldozers can interrupt your morning meetings. I believe we cannot accept the suspension of our basic liberties and meekly accept any concept of “reset” that resets us to a previous era where we were not free to meet. These freedoms were hard one by our Protestant forebears and we should not be surrendering them to godless politicians.

At the very least, we should understand that for the first time in modern history you had two leaders³⁶ in Trump and Johnson who were not prepared to sign-up to an internationalist, socialist and globalist agenda. Johnson was nearly taken out with the disease (with some prophets even prophesying it as a means of humbling the pride of the UK³⁷) and Trump has had continual coup attempts since he came into power. The mainstream media in his own country have been openly siding with China’s vision of a new economic world order and refusing to report their direct culpability and responsibility for the creation and propagation of the virus³⁸. In Trump, regardless of what you may think of his playboy past and penchant for the uncouth tweet, you also have a leader that is prepared to allow God and Jesus

³⁵ <https://medium.com/@mmacneill123/should-i-obey-my-government-on-civil-disobedience-and-the-covid-19-novel-coronavirus-74c944588dec>

³⁶ There are others who have been emboldened to stand up once Trump balked the internationalist norm. Lance Wallnau calls them “*sheep leaders*”.

³⁷ I personally witnessed this and will be most interested to hear their response to his recovery.

³⁸ <https://youtu.be/bpQFCcSI0pU> This is not just a run of the mill conspiracy theorist video, this was created by someone intimately familiar with China and the operation of the CCP (having lived and worked there for 10 years) and who understands the flow of information around the Chinese internet. It is a careful and impressive piece of investigative journalism that has been picked up by none of the world’s major broadcasters. Interestingly though, in the last few days some mainstream media outlets on both sides of the Atlantic are beginning to engage with the China aspect in a less partisan way, rather than berating it as “conspiracy theory” or xenophobic propaganda, e.g. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-52321529> and <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2020/april/lawmakers-call-for-action-against-chinas-communist-regime-for-concealing-danger-of-coronavirus-crisis>

specifically into both his national conversation as President of the US and the international conversation by advocating for persecuted Christians throughout the world at the UN, withdrawing from Treaties that directly threatened Israel and the Jews, withdrawing from faulty climate accords that would limit the ability of poor nations to industrialise and create wealth for their citizens, supported the rights of the unborn, stripped away regulation, enforced an economic discipline on multinationals preventing cheap labour and that allowed a higher rate of employment amongst black and ethnic minorities so they could work rather than rely on government subsidy and wanted to be remembered as “*the President that prayed the most*”. This was a model of recovery for other nations and there was a satanic assault on it.

What does scripture instruct us about such men at this point:

1 Timothy 2:1-4 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

It tells us that by praying for such as these in authority we establish the *social conditions of tranquillity and quietness*³⁹ that enable the gospel to be preached and all men to be saved. This is in complete opposition to celebrating the “lockdown” of citizens as a love gift of God to us as an act of national correction and the toppling our idols. The lockdown has been an act of international destruction. This is rather eisegesis masquerading as prophetic insights and those who peddle such “wisdom” that reinforces our passivity to social and political tyranny need rebuke⁴⁰. The clear text of scripture in 1Tim 2 asserts the contrary for our church age. It is similar to

³⁹ The Greek is particularly vivid here.

⁴⁰ During an online meeting I was involved in on the 17th April 2020, a prophet trained at Bethel (so they must be right) used the term “a spirit of fear masquerading as wisdom”. I could not agree more.

some who will look at a major shopping mall as a Temple of Mammon⁴¹, others will look at it as a place where wealth is generated and the poor can do business, prosper and feed themselves. If I consider it a Temple of Mammon and a storm blows the roof off and destroys the stock of businesses there, it is not difficult for me to chain a few anti-greed scriptures together and declare God has demonstrated His sovereignty and judged the wicked.

However, this is just an example of the worst kind of evangelical fundamentalism and its prejudice with a fresh coat of prophetic paint, for the probability is that a few weeks before my fictional disaster a Christian broadcaster was interviewing the Christian entrepreneur who had outlets in the same mall and was being congratulated for impacting the community in a positive way. We are behaving as Dispensationalists who are demonstrating our greater ignorance of the dominion mandate that was given to us in Genesis 1:26-28:

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth." ²⁷ God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground."

This should be enough to inform us that God does not go about destroying businesses unless those businesses are working in opposition to His purposes. Business, like every other aspect of culture, is to be redeemed and used for building the kingdom. How many Kingdom businesses were decimated during this time by

⁴¹ I was in a car with a senior leader in 1996 who pointed out the window as we drove past the Metro Centre in Newcastle Upon Tyne, when he pointed out the window declaring it a "Temple of Mammon".

the unnecessary and ungodly actions of the civil authorities?⁴² The need to redeem culture generally was just beginning to get serious traction within the wider Christian consciousness and this massive State intervention, furloughing of the workforce and the open idolatry with respect to a state health service⁴³, is a state socialist coup energised by the satanic to neuter the wider cultural witness. At this point we should be aggressively standing against this virus that has assaulted us and not indulging our prophetic appetites for mystical intensions of God's purposes.

For example, this is a word from a senior British prophet that I believe captures perfectly how we *should* be praying:

“to decree and declare that COVID-19 has no right to be in our house, in our communities, in our city, region or nation...we can come together as an *ekklesia* and pronounce an eviction order for COVID-19...
...1 John 4:18 is an eviction order signed by the love of God against fear.”⁴⁴

⁴² President Trump to his credit is putting a large amount of pressure on State governors to reopen the American economy. He recognises that 75% of Americans are employed by small businesses of 25 employees or less and they cannot survive an extended shutdown.

⁴³ This is not to say we should not appreciate the genuine work of the committed individuals within our medical profession. I worked for three years in the British NHS with committed professionals, but the agency is unaffordable and dysfunctional (it has endured at least four major reorganisations since the 1980s). It is impossible for it to do that which has been asked of it during any pandemic. The very term in the UK of “national health service” suggests a government agency that will provide for and fix your health, it was established as part of the British socialist utopia after the Second World War that would “take care of you from the cradle to the grave”. Only God (and by implication, it should have been the church as it was in previous centuries) has the resources to undertake this task. The NHS (in common with many health services around the world) is predominantly about treatment, not prevention. In contrast, the strongest defence against most forms of sickness and in particular, Coronaviruses (which are mild), is to be fit and healthy, see <https://heated.medium.com/theres-an-epidemic-that-s-a-bigger-threat-than-the-coronavirus-ce6e0697185b>. This article was written by a senior medical doctor with a background in epidemiology. My summary of his article is that we are straining the infection fly whilst swallowing the sloppy lifestyle camel. Imagine if just a fraction of the money spent on managing this pandemic has been spent on health education and a robust testing infrastructure.

⁴⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=537607370292333>.

Jennifer LeClaire, founder of the Awakening House of Prayer (AHOP) has taken a similar, unapologetic, aggressive stance which you can get a watch here⁴⁵. In particular, she makes the following strong statements:

“[By closing our Churches] we give up our privileges and responsibilities to be salt and light...We must be careful not to bow too far to authority [that is ungodly]⁴⁶.”

“*The enemy* engineered this virus to bring fear, and disruption to the nations and economies around the world...Fear is unreasonable [but it sells media].”

“If we respond in fear, we dilute our authority in future battles.”

“You cannot bow to fear and Jesus at the same time.”

“Coronavirus is subject to the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.”

“Coronavirus is a *demonic entity* that is invading our cities.” (emphasis added)

Did you hear this, “demonic entity that is invading our cities”? This is so refreshingly in line with John 10:10, it is a perfect expression of it. It is also relevant to consider my second scripture at this point for it asserts that “it will not be my doing” (v.15) when the destroyer manifests in our midst but our required attitude is to be that of those who are confident in the Lord to deliver us from our enemies and to vindicate our stand for the truth. There is no exclusion of trouble coming to us (much like Psalm 91) but we do have the promise of deliverance if we take our governmental position as believers and exercise faith in God through His Word.

There are no involved hermeneutics to justify our incarceration at God’s bidding or as an act of His sovereignty, there are no elaborate and involved inferences of passages from Haggai or Hosea, tales of the tumours of the Philistines

⁴⁵ “Prophetic Perspective on the Coronavirus”, AHOP AM Service available at AHOP online, <https://ahop.online/>. You will need to create an account but it is free to view.

⁴⁶ This is a theme of my essay here, <https://medium.com/@mmacneill123/should-i-obey-my-government-on-civil-disobedience-and-the-covid-19-novel-coronavirus-74c944588dec>

as an excuse for God's worldwide cruelty (we consider these more below), but a call to faith and a call to exercise authority to bring freedom and order back into our society. Lance Wallnau makes this helpful statement that reinforces the need for political awareness in our prophetic culture, "*Anarchy is the only way that the world will embrace Lucifer [as the solution]*". By this he means the failure of the church to take a place of cultural authority will permit lawlessness. You cannot lock people up for ever and take away their livelihoods without people getting very angry. You certainly cannot afford for the government to pay everybody and not generate wealth, that is when you get the runaway inflation and the breakdown of the world economy which promotes a willingness to embrace a new world order advocated by some false saviour.

However, I have based my entire argument so far on the theology inferred from John 10:10 and we all know a single scripture, even allowing that I take the whole book of John to be an expansion of John 10:10, might still be considered by my opponents to be insufficient to establish any truth. It is legitimate to assert that theology is not built on any single book of scripture but on scripture as a whole. It is also legitimate at times to argue from allegory and to infer patterns in God's dealing with Israel as to how He deals with us. It is indeed true that "*Every scripture is inspired by God and useful*" (2 Tim 3:16) and so we should be able to draw from all over the Hebrew scriptures (for these were the only scriptures Paul was referring to) when making a biblical argument. Thus, in particular, we need to deal with the problems of God's "permissive" will (position (3)) that has repeatedly been used by prophets in adding divine sanction to our current lockdown, economic collapse and move to online social interaction.

So, let us consider the concept of God's "permissive" will. It is oftentimes expressed that there is disobedience to the will of God, a "permissive" will and a perfect will of God. Disobedience and the perfect will of God seem self-explanatory – Jonah was disobedient to God and Jesus was perfectly obedient to God, even to crucifixion. Now, the permissive will of God must be position between these extremes, but it cannot be the case that there is a continuum between these poles, for we cannot add a 50% disobedience to the perfect will and end up in the centre of the permissive. In such cases, we would have to say we started off in obedience and became disobedient. These must be self-contained categories to be sensible.

Thus, when we talk about the "permissive will" of God we should mean something less than the ideal but not in disobedience. There is still here the retention of some positive sense about the category – the Israelites were warned against a king⁴⁷, but they chose Saul who eventually ceded to the House of David and Solomon built a dynasty which was renowned throughout the known world. We see how God partnered with the nation to bring about His purposes using a structure that was not His "perfect" will. He had explained to the Israelites that the structure had a fundamental ungodly weakness (it was hierarchical with the power concentrated at the top) and, sure enough, in the time of Rehoboam all the magnificence of the Kingdom was destroyed and the nation never recovered other than for the occasional revival. In this sense the permissive is that which is functional provided there is obedience at every step and the special safeguards which God specified are in place and honoured, e.g. the King had to meditate on the

⁴⁷ 1 Sam 8:6 ff.

Book of the Law. This would keep the structure “salted”. So, God has presented us with His perfect Law, but we choose to diverge from it in our civil law because He has given us the legal right to do so but not necessarily the moral authority in what we have condoned⁴⁸. However, there is still the sense that God is prepared to work with the people and what they have chosen.

However, there is surely a negative conception of the term also. It is well understood that the Israelites were subject to the covenant sanctions and discipline of Deuteronomy 27-28. Sometimes the surrounding pagan nations oppressed and persecuted the people, this is perceived as being done with God’s permission in that God did nothing to prevent it and warned them of it. God was a shield for His people but if His people were disobedient or unwilling, that shield was lifted to the degree the chastisement of the Lord was ministered by whoever the Lord in His sovereignty appointed. Thus, Hazeal the Syrian (2Ki 8) executed judgment against the rebellion of Israel and Judah. The greater the disobedience, the greater the chastisement, for God is treating us as sons when He disciplines us, and if we escape merely through the fire (1 Co 3:15) because of our gross disobedience, we must submit to the father of our spirits (Heb. 12:9-11), be reformed and live.

Similarly, perhaps the most extreme example of God’s “permission” in scripture is the book of Job. Here God is liaising with the “Satan” figure. There is great debate as to the identification of this figure within the sophisticated prophetic church today but there need not be, the figure is intent on stealing, killing and

⁴⁸ David could not be tried for the adultery with Bathsheba because adultery was no longer illegal in Israel, the community had changed their civil law. However, the moral law had not changed and David was eventually rebuked by Nathan.

destroying, we can safely assume it is the Satan of John 10:10⁴⁹. Here the permission of God would extend to complete destruction of property, family, industrial, political and social infrastructure around Job. If there was ever an answer to Job, it would be the great speech of Yahweh from ch.38 onwards which would seem to express the call to “trust” because you do not understand the true nature of reality and what you have just experienced. You may think it is “bad” but that is because you do not have the “God’s eye view” and do not appreciate “the Lord’s purpose” (Jam 5:11). It was only when “*Job prayed for his friends*” (Job 42:10) that he was restored. There are lots of neat little pericopes here that have provided the basis for many a prophetic word for those of us digging the mystical treasures of Job.

Thus, as far we can correlate with what is happening today, it would be that we are having a “Job” episode as a body of Christ for there is not only the disciplining and chastisement elements of the milder view of the permissive will but also the permission granted to Satan to kill, steal and destroy both the redeemed and the unredeemed. It seems we are now in the position of Job to pray for our friends, the “unredeemed” and our countries at this time, we shall be restored and end up with twice as much as before. If we want to square the circle of John 10:10 with the Book of Job and reinterpret the goodness of God as permitting the ruin of the world this would seem to be our only way.

⁴⁹ The debate seems to centre around the presence of the article before the Hebrew word for Satan. This means there is an emphasis on the accusatory character rather than the personality and thus the debate as to whether this is a “son of God” with a special investigative mission rather than the personality Satan. Even if we granted that for the sake of argument, we still will have not proved that this is not Satan acting as a satanizer. Additionally, the LXX (Septuagint) uses ὁ διάβολος here which means the Devil or Satan without ambiguity (in Greek the article before the name refers to the person as a noted personality).

So, can there be a rejoinder to such a robust picture that has been painted for us? There surely can be, the reliability of the allegory drawn from Job as a general theological principle is questionable. Firstly, it is argued by many scholars that the Prologue to Job (featuring the Satan figure) and Yahweh's great speeches beyond chapter 37 were not original⁵⁰ because they are prose rather than the poetry of the main part of the book. The insertion of the passages (as well as Elihu's speech) was for theological reasons and it helps structure the story to enable the rescue of God's questionable character and inactivity with respect to Job's suffering. The condition of this being inserted into the canon is circumstantially at least, because of the editing of the story to bring it up to an acceptable standard. It might have been otherwise relegated to an apocryphal work, derivative from the "righteous sufferer" narratives that were found throughout the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia⁵¹. When you read the historical books of the bible such as Samuel, Chronicles and Kings, we are accompanied at all points with a theological commentary by the editors that asserts the absolute sovereignty of God and His intimate involvement at every stage. There was just no conception within this period of Judaism of events independent of the causative will of God and this is what we see overlaid in Job. As one of my most knowledgeable and orthodox teachers told me, do not build your doctrine *solely* on the poetry of the Bible, all scripture is God-breathed, truthfully stated but not all scripture is logical truth or systematic theology and any inferences from poetic

⁵⁰ See for example: Irwin, W.A. 'Job' in *Dictionary of the Bible*, 2nd Edition (T & T Clark, Edinburgh: 1967); Douglas, J.D., 'Job' in *The New Bible Dictionary* (IVP, Leicester: 1976). Both of these dictionaries are high quality academic works and the articles were written by distinguished scholars. Commentaries on Job are notoriously variable because of the challenges of the poetic form of the text, the LXX translators really struggled with it and there were numerous revisions.

⁵¹ Two differing perspectives are found here <https://www.ancient.eu/article/226/the-ludlul-bel-nimeqi---not-merely-a-babylonian-jo/> and <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3260156.pdf> The former is a light and easy read but you get a feel for the common themes; the latter is a heavy duty foundational look at the seed-bed for much of the literature of which the Hebrew Bible religious tradition is a part.

literature must be assessed against systematic theology. We, unlike the spiritual Jews of that period, do not believe all events originate in the causative will or even the permissive will of God. We would find it morally abhorrent that God “permits” rape or child-abuse simply because it happens and because He does not intervene to stop it. We must be rigorous in our assessment of what we draw from the First Covenant to our Second, New Covenant. In other words, we must make sure we are looking at this event from the “right side of the Cross” and building our theology on with reference to the Christian scriptures.

However, those of us who are Reformed would be shifting in our seats uncomfortably with me messing with the seamless garment of scripture as this point and in arguing about high-level philosophical presuppositions. In most things Reformed, when life gets theologically difficult, we invoke “the Providence of God” that picks up the problems like those above. Thus, the believer concerned only with a low-level phenomenological⁵² investigation of scripture can indeed find great suffering amongst the people of God, people were killed, just as Christ “*learned obedience through what he suffered and being perfected...became the source of eternal salvation*” (Heb. 5:8-9). We have Paul’s thorn in the flesh. Could this misery and suffering not be the gateway to a great revival? Are we in the book of Haggai and Hosea? Are we in the Passover of Egypt? We have a multitude of spiritual pictures and lessons we might learn from and many prophets are currently expounding on those themes. However, they are not doctrinal expositions but

⁵² Phenomenology is an investigation into events in the world without considering “why” those events took place. For the phenomenologist, the “why” question is a question that just invites speculation, cannot be answered and creates confusion, we need to be concerned with reality as it presents itself to us.

allegorical allusions useful for didactic purposes. For example, it may well be that there follows a great revival in the period after this event but this is because the revival was already here and it was Satan's fear of what was happening in the church throughout the Earth that created the need for a worldwide satanic move that ministers fear to people to hinder its progress. Similarly, the \$3 Trillion that fell through our Haggairian bag with holes in it because we were too busy on our own projects rather than God's is surely a sobering thought for us all and the infidelity of the bride of Hosea as a picture of the church today is surely profound; we can meditate on it and if we draw lessons from it that lead us to greater personal and corporate commitment, the scripture has proved useful. Yet, it could just as much be a massive theft of Satan directed against the resurgent America both economically and spiritually. Both scenarios fit the empirical circumstances and neither has any merit above the other on doctrinal grounds, only on the worldview of the prophet as illustrated by prophets in different movements embracing what they prefer. In contrast, a doctrinal approach would expound that fear and the propagation of it has been one of the most distinctive features of this episode. People are afraid of one another, their environment and for their future. Fear is the spiritual force associated with Satan and is the reciprocal of faith. As I mentioned previously Paul instructs us to pray for conditions that allow all men to be saved and those conditions are peace and tranquillity, not fear-filled chaos. That again, should be enough to clear up our fuzzy thinking and get us praying and proclaiming accurately.

So, are we in a "shaking"? This is one of the most popular motifs within our movement. However, in scripture, most of the time when a "shaking" of heaven and

earth is spoken of⁵³, it is not to destroy His people but to rebuild and to restore them from otherwise unfavourable social conditions. It may well be accompanied with an exhortation to repent but a clear distinction is always made in the justice of God between the ungodly and the godly. Scripture tells us of plagues and pestilences being loosed on the blasphemous, not indiscriminately on believers and not even unbelievers as a whole. To speak of this episode as a “shaking” is to miscategorise it for believers have been affected as much as non-believers. The “shaking” of Haggai enriches the believers and reconstructs social relations, it does not impoverish them. Additionally, where the great shaking events are depicted negatively in scripture, they are followed with the words “*but you did not come back to me*” or the lament “*the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent*”⁵⁴. If the aim was that of the shaking discipline to lead to repentance, it failed every time and it failed because of the apostate condition of those to whom God was declaring final judgment against, these were judgments that would terminate in destruction. If we want to classify the entire economic system of the world as “Babylon” ripe for judgment and somehow we must all “*come out of her*” we should abandon our seven mountains theology all together and become thorough-going Dispensationalists, at least we can then get out at the Rapture.

So, let me emphasise the exegetical principle that should qualify our use of the Jewish scriptures, especially the prophetic writings, in drawing parallels with today. It is perfectly permissible in our freedom and inspiration to exhort to a greater depth of fidelity and worship but we must recognise these inspirations are

⁵³ Isa 13:13; Joel 3:16; Hag 2:21

⁵⁴ Hag 2:6; Rev 9:21 and often repeated from then on.

fundamentally allegorical, soundly didactic but they are not doctrinal. They are eisegetical constructions which may be useful for teaching and rhetoric but need explicating (or “testing”) against the clear statements of doctrine we have, especially in what we call the Christian scriptures⁵⁵. Otherwise we end up with contradictory, vague accounts of events and are busy repenting rather than seeing the signs of the times. If, as Chuck believes, we shall see an all-out economic confrontation between the US and China which may even spill over into a military stand-off⁵⁶, the call to personal reformation might seem rather trivial in light of our corporate responsibility to go on the offensive. I favour the categorical statements of Christian scripture that is the foundation of the dispensation of the *ekklesia* against elaborate prophetic reinterpretations of temporal conditions.

This leads us logically on to the strongest refutation of this being a permissive act of God, in that it requires a redefinition of the term “goodness of God”. I mentioned when stating the “permissive case” that “goodness” must be redefined to include the “severity” of God in that His goodness is judged by the intended result. However, this is really accusing God of naked utilitarianism rather than evaluating the moral nature of the act itself and makes any act at all justifiable if there was some “good” end⁵⁷. Scripture again is explicit on this point, “*the kindness (or*

⁵⁵ When the New Testament writers wrote, they did not consider their writings scripture. The one exception is 2 Peter where the writer (there is legitimate scholarly debate whether the author was actually Peter because the Greek is so different to 1 Peter; it was not unusual in the ancient world for disciples to write in the name of their most important leader) describes Paul’s writings as “scripture”.

⁵⁶ It has been reported by the BBC today that China has been accused of illegal nuclear tests.

⁵⁷ Some might argue this is exactly what James was doing in Jam 5:11. However, the focus here is Job’s internal attitude of patience leading to deliverance and a positive assertion of confidence that we have as believers in the character of God. True, this is a challenging verse to interpret, but I refer you to my previous discussion of Job earlier in the essay for the problematic nature of the text and the dangers of inferring too much from it. Both the Christian and Jewish scriptures repeatedly reinforce a non-utilitarian moral character of God, God is concerned with “truth in the inward parts”, i.e. truth as a value in itself (Jesus was the Truth, the Way, the Life; justice and righteousness are the foundation of His throne), rather than because of its utility.

goodness) of God leads you to repentance” (Rom 2:4) with kindness directly contrasted with “severity” later in the same letter, “*Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness;*” (Rom 11:22). God’s kindness is not somehow to be embedded in his “severity”. Severity, when associated exclusively with the concept of judgment is of the apostate Israel and secondly the rebellious, carnal believer⁵⁸. It is targeted and specific, not general and indiscriminate.

So, in conclusion, my basic problem with giving God direct responsibility for the crisis is that it a basic contradiction to our Christian scriptures. Secondly, when we attempt to use the “permissive” will concept, we cannot avoid characterising the episode if we look at it empirically as a Job like episode where permission really becomes partnership with Satan and the greater purpose of God is being orchestrated. This I declared unsafe because we are basing our theology on poetry with textual and theological issues. In contrast, the shakings, judgment and plagues of scripture were targeted and specific, often connected with extreme rebellion and blasphemy. There is no contradiction in holding this position and the need for suffering chastisement, rebuke and exhortation at the hands of apostles and prophets, we can indeed check “we are in God’s program” and repent of our ignorance of the signs of the times but we should recognise this attack was a response to the progress of Kingdom thought rather than a rebuke because of the lack of it. Thirdly, as a community, we seemed to have been particularly ignorant and naïve with regard to the *why* of this episode. The activity of Satan in the

⁵⁸ The Greek word ἀποτομία translated “severity” only occurs in Rom 11:22 and 2Co 13:10. Other times the English word severity is used, it is with an entirely different sense of the word.

domains of human life and especially our media and political realms has been blatant and we have responded with platitudes about “love for our enemies”, criticising leaders that have sided with Christ because of our prejudice rather than discerning the spirit and agreeing with those God has raised up. We need aggressive action both in the prayer room and the socio-political and economic spheres. The prophetic justifications seem to have ignored the socio-political dimension of the problem or treated it as an incidental rather than recognising that the episode was an attempted global reconstruction of the social, economic and political relations between nations, removed individual freedom, normalised intimate State control of nations and individuals, and created a new level of global media manipulation and control. By pushing us all online, it becomes very easy to turn us offline should the need arise.

Finally, as a last word, it is an affront to God’s character to suggest He had any role in orchestrating this pandemic, wicked men inspired and controlled by Satan created and released it with malicious intent. Our responsibility is indeed to serve eviction notices at this time and to move to a new place of dominion.