

What does Covid-19 have to do with God?



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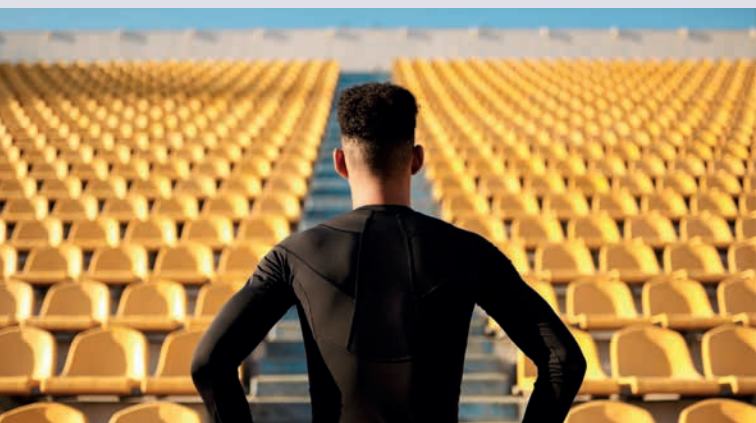
Never before has a disease brought the whole world to its knees in the unprecedented way it did in the northern spring of 2020. The new coronavirus 'Covid-19' brought public life to a global standstill with astonishing speed. Worldwide, shutdowns were ordered, events cancelled, universities, schools and childcare centres were closed. Football games were cancelled or took place before empty stands. Worship services were forbidden—something which did not even happen in wartime.

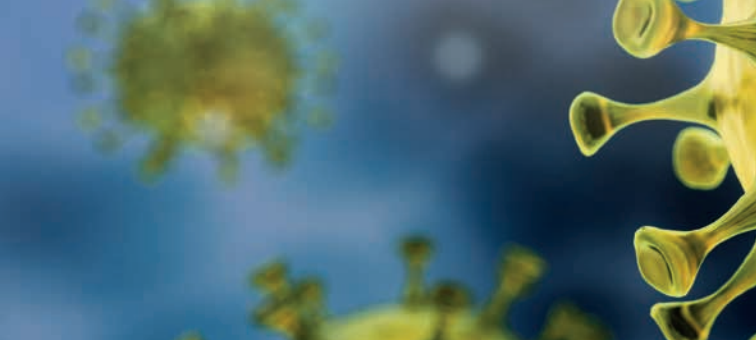
A highly mobile society, with all the world's continents connected by 130,000 aircraft carrying 12 million passengers every day, suddenly found itself in standby mode. This was such a major rupture that it involved everyone around the world. The sudden impact upon mankind was so great, it even eclipsed the climate debate.

In a TV program about the crisis on April 14 2020, microbiologist *Lothar H. Wieler*, president of the Robert Koch Institute in Berlin, revealed the extent of the helplessness: "This pandemic has never existed before. We don't have a blueprint to act on. The disease is new."

The coronavirus measures also caused an unforeseen economic and financial crisis in all countries.

The extent of the damage cannot yet be estimated. IMF chief economist *Gita Gopinath* said: "The magnitude and speed of collapse ... is unlike anything experienced in our lifetimes." Germany





mobilised the largest aid package in its history; in late April 2020, the nation's burden was over 1.3 trillion US dollars, three times the normal annual Federal expenditure. On April 16, 2020 a *Washington Post* headline read: "The US has thrown more than \$6 trillion at the coronavirus crisis. That number could grow." The ensuing debts worldwide are estimated to take generations to repay, if ever.

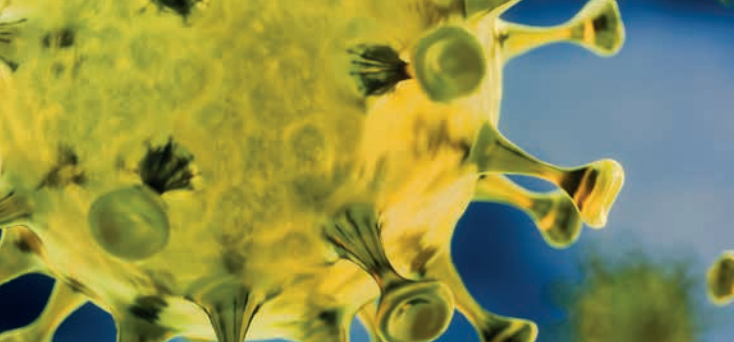
We search for an explanation for this pandemic. Who will give it to us?

The churches have given us no answers

The historian Prof. *Michael Wolffsohn*, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of April 20, 2020, bemoaned the silence of the church: "I for one have not come across any in-depth theological interpretation of this pandemic from leading clergymen."

The *Welt am Sonntag* (World on Sunday) headline: "Will the coronavirus crisis become a declaration of bankruptcy for the churches?" The article states: "The self-restraint of the churches seems strange at a time when guidance is more in demand than ever. In the peace movement, in the retrofitting debate [housing energy efficiency], in the resistance to nuclear power, in the struggle for solidarity with the Third World and against Hartz IV [unemployment benefit reforms] in Germany, the Christian churches were ... always at the forefront. For years, the former bishop and chairwoman of the council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, *Margot Käßmann*, could be expected to comment or even lecture on almost any subject. Often also without being asked. Now she is unforthcoming." (Quoted in *ideaSpektrum*, 16.2020, p. 11.)

So we turn to the Bible—or put differently, what does God tell us about all this in His Word?



1. We live in a fallen world

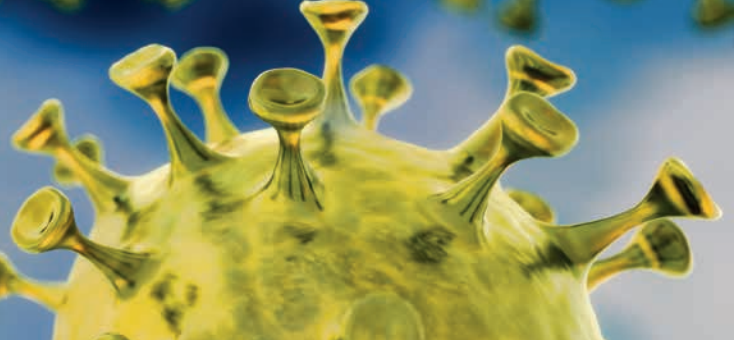
Our life here has a 100 percent mortality rate. Everything is transient and perishing. About 20 million different poisons are known in this creation. Snake venoms are so highly complex that even the best chemists were long unable to synthesize these compounds. Whoever tries to explain this world with all its bad things, yet ignores the Fall from the beginning of human history, will inevitably end up with misinterpretations.

All human attempts to build an earthly paradise have always failed. The reason for this is sin with its law: ***"The wages of sin is death"*** (The Bible, Romans 6:23). That is why there are so many wars, so much hatred, so many diseases, and death in this world. In these Covid-19 times we have become aware of this anew.

2. In the majority view, God has nothing to do with Covid-19

In our time it's become common to only preach one-sidedly, about the love of God; the judgements of God are largely ignored. The Bible, on the other hand, shows us that the Deluge with its millions of deaths was caused by God, as was the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the scattering of the people of Israel all over the world. The New Testament describes terrible judgements to come (Revelation 8–11; 16), such as the world has not previously known. Here, too, the One who caused them is named (Revelation 8:1; 16:1).

Can one push God aside in the Covid crisis as easily as so many politicians and church leaders have? The Catholic



Bishop of Magdeburg *Gerhard Feige*, with his contribution in *Christ und Welt* (Christ and World) No. 17 of April 16, 2020, is representative of such thinking. He quotes “the most recent joint statement of the Catholic, Evangelical and Orthodox Church in Germany”, in which it was said: “Sickness is not God’s punishment—neither for individuals nor for entire societies, nations and continents or even for all of humanity. Diseases are part of our human nature as vulnerable and fragile beings.”

So, in a worldwide event like this Covid-19 pandemic, we are meant to ignore the God who even counts the hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:30), and who gives each of the 10^{25} stars its own name (Psalm 147:4). Or have we already declared God dead (*Nietzsche*)?

Nothing is more urgent than heeding the statements of the Bible, because only from there will we be able to appropriately assess things. When it comes to droughts and floods, have we considered what is written in Job 12:15? ***“If he withholds the waters, they dry up; if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land.”***

3. The forgotten God

In light of our topic, consider that in Germany alone, in 2019 there were 100,000 abortions, and more than triple that number in the US. According to the Bible, this is murder. We have unilaterally and comprehensively replaced the biblical truth of the creation account with a scientifically unsustainable story of microbes-to-man evolution. Are we aware of what we have thereby done? By rejecting or nullifying His Word—the Bible—we accuse God of lying.

The climate debate has taken on the features of a substitute religion. With state-sanctioned same-sex marriage sweeping the world, we have disregarded God's command. At the same time as it increasingly rejects Christianity, the West is deliberately embracing Islam. This religion not only categorically rejects the Cross, the Koran describes unbelievers—from an Islamic viewpoint that includes Christians, Jews and atheists—as the vilest of creatures (Surah 98:6).

The list of misconduct could be extended at will. We act as if God did not even exist. Or have we constructed for ourselves a make-believe god—as the post-war poet *Wolfgang Borchert* put it—who is not responsible for anything anymore?

Most nations have become godless. What if we were to take an opinion poll of passers-by in a busy square of a major European city and ask: "Do you believe in Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen Lord, and have you consciously turned to Him in a personal decision?" How many would answer with a clear YES? The result would very definitely be well below 5 percent.

Should God be silent on all of this? Galatians 6:7 says: *"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap."*

4. Covid-19 has a lot to do with God!

In view of our point 3, we now consider what God revealed to King Solomon: *"When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send*



pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:13–14).

Here God lets us know that He is and remains the One acting in everything. He is the one who holds back the rain, brings a plague of locusts across the land, permits extensive forest fires and tsunamis and sends a plague (e.g. Ebola, coronavirus). **So Covid-19 does have something to do with God!**

We may try to explain all such things scientifically, or as human failure; or even to attribute them to chance. We would be just as wrong as if someone wanted to explain away the three-and-a-half year absence of rain in Elijah’s time (James 5:17–18).

The prophet Amos (3:6) says dramatically: *“Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?”* Similarly in Isaiah 45:7: *“I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things.”* We are astonished that God presents Himself as the cause of accidents, calamities, epidemics etc. At first glance, this horrifies us. But both are valid—God causes misfortune, or He permits it (see point 5)—in all cases, whether actively or passively caused, God is and remains sovereign over all things.

5. There is yet another power in this world

Since sin entered the world, God has relinquished a portion of His power over the world to the devil, the *“ruler of this world”* (John 12:31, 14:30). Paul even calls him the *“god of this world”* (2 Corinthians 4:4). He has been assigned a certain degree of power, which he uses to tempt people, to lead them astray, sow hate and enmity, and even instigate wars.

From the Bible (Job 1:12, Luke 22:31) we learn that he is nonetheless only permitted to operate within boundaries set by God. He has been defeated through Jesus’ death on the Cross. Jesus has power over him and all demons (John 14:30b; Luke 7:21). It is good to know that no power can separate us from our Lord and God, and we thus have a sure haven: *“My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust”* (Psalm 91:2).

6. Man as perpetrator

Since God has given us a free will, we are capable of all manner of acts, both good and, unfortunately, also evil. Quite a few kings and dictators have brought great misery upon this world through their rule.

7. How does God speak to us today?

God does nothing arbitrarily—He is not capricious. Everything He does has a reason and is justified, and He often announces His judgements long enough in advance to give us the opportunity to repent: *“For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets”* (Amos 3:7). This is what God did, e.g., before the Deluge (Genesis 6:7) or before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18).

In Hebrews 1:1–2 we read: *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son [Jesus Christ].”* Even today, God speaks to us personally, namely through His Son, Jesus Christ.

To understand the coronavirus crisis, we look to Jesus.

Luke 24:45 says of Him: *“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”* So we are directed to the Bible, which unlocks Jesus for us through the Holy Spirit. Holding to this biblical alignment can prevent us from falling for the many self-proclaimed but false prophets.

Given all of this, we are justified in asking the question, did this Covid-19 pandemic come upon this world by accident, or was it sent by God? Excluding God would definitely be the wrong answer. We are here confronted with His action in this world. And while we may not be able to unequivocally decipher its full significance, it seems to me the above considerations readily lead to four conclusions about the pandemic:

- It reminds us of the perishability and groaning of the entire creation (Romans 8:21–22). God wants to lead us to a place of humility (Micah 6:8).



- It is a judgement by God upon a world that has become godless. God is calling us to turn around (Revelation 3:19).
- It is a call of God that we might find salvation in Jesus, so as not to suffer eternal judgement (Hebrews 9:27).
- It is a sign of the soon coming return of Jesus. He foretold that His coming would be preceded by *“birth pains”* (Matthew 24:8).

Clearly, all four points need to be included in explaining this pandemic.

8. What is God's message to us?

What do we learn from this coronavirus crisis? The first thing we recognize is our helplessness. Despite all our technical achievements, we have to acknowledge and accept our limitations. We can see that this event has affected the whole world. No nation or group of people has been exempt—one way or another, it has affected Christians and atheists, Muslims and Hindus, young and old, the poor and the rich. It has affected the healthy and those already infirm—in short, everyone!

When God speaks to us so universally, the question arises: Is there a message that also applies to every person on Earth? The Bible gives us a very clear and unmistakable answer, in passages such as:

- *“Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? Declares the Sovereign LORD: Rather; am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?”* (Ezekiel 18:23).
- *“[God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Timothy 2:4).

- ***“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out”*** (Acts 3:19).

In his tract *‘Fear of the Virus?’*, Manfred Röseler compares the Covid-19 virus to a much more insidious virus—namely sin. This virus brings us not only bodily death, but eternal death (Hell). We are warned in advance of this catastrophe (Revelation 21: 8), so it should not come as a surprise to anyone.

Because God is love personified (1 John 4:16), He wants to heal us—whoever we are. With Jesus’ death and resurrection, medicine against the virus of sin is available. Now the short, saving message is: ***“Whoever believes in the Son [of God] has eternal life”*** (John 3:36). Confess to God’s Son Jesus the shortcomings of your life—especially your way of life without Him—and ask Him to enter your life. Then you will have been healed and will have won Heaven.

How you can do this in practice is explained in detail here: ***werner.gitt.com/turning***

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