

the presbyterian banner

June 2017



*The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to its kinds
and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds.*

And God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:12

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Editorial

There are very simplistic solutions proffered for the spiralling crime problem. More police, harsher sentences, better education, safe injecting rooms. All of these and the rest of what people mention in letters to the editor take the form of trying to adjust things on the outside. They don't actually get to the heart of the issue, which is the change needed on the inside.

Let me give you an example: There is a drug addict I know. He has been through a number of the state secular courses and others but he keeps getting sucked back into the drug addicted lifestyle. It is only if he comes clean on the inside, though, that he will be able to make a fresh start on the outside. This means he has to give up all addictive substances, including smoking, and go through a process where he is re-educated in his mind and heart. Such a year-long course as that offered by the Christian ministry Teen Challenge does exactly this.

In the same way, only if God moves in our community through repentance and coming to faith and thus a return to biblical values will we really come to grips with the crime plague. Until then the brokenness will only multiply and so there will be increasing domestic violence, suicides, robberies, road rage, and so on.

Much as the authorities may trumpet the record drug hauls they uncover, these are only a small drop in the ocean of the illicit drugs entering our nation. Our society is in a very, very bad way. And while the figures may be made to seem good and the media sound bites ever so positive it is all, humanly speaking, a lost cause.

You only need to see the way those holding to Christianity are demeaned and dismissed to realise the depth of the depravity today. What was once seen to be a valuable part of our society is sidelined and negated altogether.

It is nothing new, but it is the speed with which it has come upon and impacted the western world that is astounding. Certainly it is a time for prayer. It is also a time for standing up for what we believe and explaining lovingly the difference it makes.

*When all this had ended, the Israelites who were there
went out to the towns of Judah, smashed the sacred stones
and cut down the Asherah poles.
They destroyed the high places and the altars
throughout Judah and Benjamin and in Ephraim and Manasseh.
After they had destroyed all of them,
the Israelites returned to their own towns and to their own property.
2 Chronicles 31:1*

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What Genesis Teaches Us About The Rainbow

Genesis 9:8-17

I am sure most of you are familiar with the gay pride flag. It's the rainbow-coloured flag. It represents the symbol of LGBT pride. Its colours are said to reflect the diversity of their LGBT community. Its beginning was 1978. Its creator, Gilbert Baker, in an interview with CNN said, "We needed something to express our joy, our beauty, our power. And the rainbow did that....We're an ancient, wonderful tribe of people. We picked something from nature. We picked something beautiful....How do you argue with that? People want to argue about it, but I say: 'The rainbow's in the Bible. It's a covenant between God and all living creatures.'"

(<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/06/30/us/rainbow-flagmaker-gilbert-baker/>)

This time last year the US Supreme Court voted to allow same sex marriage. Days leading up to and following that decision, a flood of rainbow flags could be seen everywhere.

One minister wrote in response to these events, "God designed the rainbow to symbolize something far greater and far more glorious than homosexuality, and if those in the homosexual community truly understood and embraced the symbol they are waving in their hands, they would experience true freedom and peace."

(<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-does-the-rainbow-mean-for-gays>)

In our passage from Genesis 9 we find the real meaning of the rainbow. As odd as it sounds, Gilbert Baker was right: "It's a covenant between God and all living creatures." However, Mr Gilbert did not open up what he meant by that (or at least the CNN reporter/editor chose not to report it).

As many of you might know a

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covenant is a solemn promise or pledge. A binding promise between two parties. Marriage is often used as an example of a

Genesis 9:8-17

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹ "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰ and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

¹² And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.

¹⁶ Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

¹⁷ So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

Graeme Hart

covenant with promises (or vows) of faithfulness, love and commitment. But **this** covenant is different.

It's different because of the parties of the covenant.

1. The Parties of the Covenant

The parties are not two equals, two humans. The parties are the holy Creator God and sinful humanity.

The Initiator (Gen.9:9,11,12,17)

Throughout the passage, we are told repeated **who** makes the covenant. It is God. "Elohim." The Supreme, Almighty, All powerful God. The Creator God.

And it is **only** Him. Not Noah. Not his sons. No one makes this covenant except God alone.

In making this covenant God condescends. He comes down to the level of his creation.

He condescends himself **in mercy** to make a solemn pledge. He doesn't need to. There were no requirements. No expectations. But he does.

And with this covenant/solemn promise **he binds himself** to perform details of covenant. He shows himself as the merciful, condescending Initiator.

Now, with whom does he make this covenant?

The Recipients (Gen. 9:9-10, 12b, 13a)

- Noah (v.9)
- His offspring (v.9)
- All future generations, i.e. perpetual, binding (v.12b)
- Every living creature (v.10)
- The earth (v.13a)

What makes this covenant unique is that it seems to be the only time God makes a covenant with animals and the earth. That in itself, makes it an interesting covenant to study!

So what about the terms of this covenant?

2. The Terms of the Covenant (Gen 9:11)

Each covenant usually has terms. There terms *bind* parties to what they've agreed.

Again, the illustration of marriage is helpful. Marriage vows form the terms of the marriage covenant, i.e. the promise to be faithful.

So what are the terms of this covenant? We find them in 9:11. God promises:

- Never again will all flesh be destroyed by flood
- Never again will there be a global flood

Just earlier God had promised never again to wipe out all living creatures (8:21) and that earth's natural cycles would continue (8:22), but now he enshrines that promise in with a solemn covenant/pledge. He binds himself to these terms. He promises to forever hold back global floodwaters (That's not to say that there will never be a severe local flood).

In the act of making a covenant with Noah, the animals and the world, God was revealing something beautiful about himself. That he is a merciful God! And even the terms of covenant show his *mercy*.

What is mercy? A simple but useful definition of mercy is "the holding back or restraining of what we deserve." God, in his mercy, promised to hold back future global floodwaters. In reality, mercy is not what we deserve. Complete, total, and devastating judgement is what we deserve. It's because "every inclination or our hearts are only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5; 8:21).

So the terms of this covenant reveal the magnificent, compassionate mercy of God, that he is willing to hold back and restrain his perfectly righteous wrath on continually sinning sinners.

Note: The terms of the covenant are **only** applicable to the Initiator, i.e. God! God does everything! All responsibility, no benefit! The recipients do nothing! All benefit, no responsibility!

Add to this the fact that only the Initiator is responsible for its ongoing maintenance. This covenant is totally one-sided!

Let's try and imagine what that might look like today! Imagine someone out of sheer generosity promises you \$10,000/week for the rest of your life! If they promised this to you when you were 20 years old and assuming you died at 80, they would have given you over \$30 million during the course of your life! This money is not dependant on your good behaviour, kindness in return, living nearby, or even the right use of the money. He will continue giving you \$10,000/ week even if you waste it on drugs, prostitutes, video games, lollies, selfish living...whatever!

We might naturally say, "He doesn't deserve this money!" That would be so true! But here's the rub: **Neither do we deserve God's restraining mercy!** To the contrary, we deserve a flood of God's judgement because we are rebels at heart. Don't be fooled. What God said back then of mankind is still true of you and me today: "...the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5) "the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth." (Gen 8:21)

When you know the rebellious wickedness of your own heart, when you feel the piercing truth of God's blunt and accurate assessment of your heart, the terms of THIS covenant (not sending global floodwaters ever again) are FAR better, infinitely better than a mere \$10,000/week.

But yet, sadly, some may think money is better than mercy. If

that is you, I'd encourage you, urge you to go and study the blindness-inducing depravity of your own heart and compare that with the breath-taking beauty God's mercy. This is why the sign of this covenant is SO beautiful, i.e. The Rainbow!

3. The Sign of the Covenant (Gen 9:12-13)

The Rainbow (9:12-13)

You've seen it before. That beautiful, multicoloured rainbow arching in the sky. The sign of God's beautiful, multi-coloured restraining mercy arching over world!

Its Purpose (9:14-16)

The whole reason it's there is to **remind God** of the binding nature of terms of the covenant he made (v.15-16)! How interesting! Is God likely to forget? Surely God is not a man that he forgets! Surely **we are the ones who need reminding** of God's ongoing binding promise whenever we see the rainbow!

The word "remember" is a particular Hebrew expression. It does not suggest God forgets! To the contrary, it explains that *God acts again according to the terms of the covenant for benefit of the recipients of the covenant*. In this case, that there will never again be a global flood.

The Bible is categorically clear: *God's rainbow arching over God's world is God's symbol of God's mercy restraining God's anger against rebellious people whose hearts are bent toward evil*.

So...why did God use a rainbow as the sign of his covenant to remind him of the terms of the covenant?

To answer that we need to go further into Scripture because Genesis 9 is not the only place the Bible speaks of a rain-

bow.

In Ezekiel 1:28, a rainbow describes the radiating glory of God: *Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him* (Ezek 1:28).

In Revelation 4:3 we read of a rainbow describing the heavenly glory encircling God's Throne: *A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne* (Rev 4:3)

From the witness of Scripture it seems that the rainbow speaks of the glory of God! This pure, radiating, heavenly, encircling glory that the Son of God willingly exchanged for flesh and blood.

Why would he do that?

So he might initiate a **better covenant!** A better covenant sealed by his blood on the cross. A better covenant that would open the flood gates of heaven and

pour out, not rain, but God's grace, forgiveness, love, and Spirit! A better covenant whose terms to you and me are *repent, believe, commit, follow, obey.*

Not only that, but so that the recipients of this new, better covenant might **see his glory!**

"Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world." (Jn 17:24)

The rainbow certainly is a beautiful symbol of God's mercy. Yet it's not the ultimate one. God's ultimate symbol of mercy is the **cross**. It is at the cross the guilty sinner finds mercy and grace in Christ.

But like a double-edged sword the cross is also God's symbol of God's **judgement**. It was at the cross God's only begotten Son received the Father's divine, righteous, furious judgement that guilty sinners deserved.

The rainbow really ought to remind us of the cross, what God did there, and what a sinner finds there -- mercy, forgiveness, restoration, new life!

Have you been there – to the cross?

"How might I get there?" you may ask. By getting on your knees! By acknowledging your own sins, repenting of them, trusting in Christ alone for acceptance with God, by committing your life to him, by following and obeying. If you have not yet done that, there is still time – Jesus has not yet returned!



When our Lord Jesus does return, the glorious radiance of that heavenly rainbow will be around him, the sky, currently the backdrop of the rainbow will be rolled up (Rev 6:14-17), and the rainbow, God's symbol of mercy, will be burned up and dissolved (2 Peter 3:10).

Those who have not gone to cross for mercy will find no mercy

when the Lamb of God returns. Those who do not know God, those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus (2 Thess 1:8) will suffer the unbearable wrath of the Lamb rather than his eternal love. What was for so long held back will be unleashed in all its terrifying vengeance and righteous fury.

If this scares you, then go to the cross! If this offends you, then think for a moment how offended God is when we take his beautiful glorious symbol of mercy, deform and degrade it into a symbol of pride in a sinful and depraved lifestyle. Think for a moment if you've seen his rainbow in the sky and you haven't even taken a moment to worship God and thank him for his mercy.

Next time you see a rainbow, remember God is still good to his word! God has remembered yet again! He has not and will not send another destructive global flood. It is yet another sign of God's patient mercy on me, others, and also those in the LGBT community. Let God's rainbow remind you of the cross of Christ and let it remind of God's glory, his pure, holy, radiating, encircling glory! Thank God for the rainbow!

The Rev. Graeme Hart ministers at the Reformed Presbyterian Church in McKinnon, Melbourne.

Radicalism Against Radicalism

An Insight Into Modern India

Samit Mishra

Radicalism

The rise of radicalism is a threat to modern civilization and secularism in many countries. The word 'radicalism' is derived from the word radical which was originally used in a political sense in 1797. It was used to denote the idea of extreme change of a part or all of the social order. In popular understanding, radicalism referred to political extremism.(1) But in the last few decades, the word radicalism has often been aligned with Islamic terrorism and is counterattacked by Hindu and Christian radicalism in many parts of the world.

It is important to note, in the present scenario, that the word radicalism is generally used for religious extremism promoted and sustained by the spirit of nationalism in a country like India. Taking the example of India, the recent



considered to be more reliable citizens of the nation than those who are Hindu or Muslim.

Radicalism and Christianity

However, radicalism is not a new invention. The term may be new but the concept is ancient. When the Israelites invaded Canaan they were expected to completely abolish the religious practice and structures of the land. The Pharisees and Sadducees were religiously radical in their approach to Christ and early Christians. In fact, Christ himself was a radical Rabbi; he was an extremist in his teachings and expectations from his followers. Radicalism has been part of every religious system. The survival of all major religions of the world proves that they all have been radical ay one or other time in history.

Does that all mean that radicalism is good? In some aspects, yes! It is even required of you if you follow a particular discipline of faith. Every committed Christian is a radical in his views. We cannot compromise with the Truth. We believe it...we stand for it...we practice it and we can even die for it. But the difference between Christian radicalism and other religious radicalism is that Christian radicalism honours the right of freedom of religion of every person. It even allows anti-Christian people to exist with all human rights and privileges. Secularism is biblical; it allows everyone to make his or her per-

sonal choice in matter of hell and heaven.

Radicalism and Christian persecution in India

Radicalism in India is a 20th century response to Islam and Christianity. At the heart of Hindu radicalism "lies the concept of Hindutva or "Hinduness", an ideology rooted in a belief that Hindus are united around a common culture which forms the basis for the Indian nation... Islamic and Christian traditions [are] considered as an illegitimate, foreign presence..." (2) This notion is now taking root in the hearts of Hindus through some political arenas and causing communal disharmony in many parts of the nation. There is no direct attack or physical violence against the Muslims on the basis of religious conversion. The population of Muslims is still



The orange flag of Hindu nationalism

developments in Indian politics have caused people to sense insecurity in the matter of religious freedom. Patriotism is assessed by the religion of the person. A follower of Islam or Christianity is considered to be less patriotic than a Hindu. The same can be said of America and other Christian countries where Christians are



big and they usually reverse every kind of attack in like manner. But on the other hand, the Christian population does not cause a political threat to any of the parties in India. Also, the Christians are not usually aggressive in their character but rather seek to be a service oriented community (Ps.109:4,5). Christian rights are exploited and we are identified as foreigners who seek to convert Hindus everywhere.

Conversion is a person's

choice. This is what is misunderstood in India. The radical Hindu activists continue to attack Christians. The rate of Christian persecution and exploitation has been constantly on the increase in the last few years. To give a recent example, one of our church planters was asked to hail their gods and threatened to leave the town at the earliest. The Christians are being falsely charged of converting people through force, service and money, whereas conversion to Hinduism is applauded without any further investigation. Contrary to the constitutional privileges, Hindu radicalism in India is seeking a "right (law) to protect" one's religion so the extremist Hindus can legitimately and physically resist conversion of fellow Hindus. Religious radicalism is heading India backward, from globalization to nationalism, from secularism to radicalism, from freedom of religion to the bondage of Hinduism.

Conclusion

The law of physics is clear: every action has a reaction. The Hindu radicalism is producing lots of positive impact among the Indian churches. The persecution is strengthening the spiritual life of the Christians. There is a sense of greater unity and zeal for mission



work. You can certainly see that one particular radicalism is fueling the other kind of radicalism.

Against the hatred love is growing, against the threat the practice of prayer is increasing, against the violence the spirit of forgiveness is

growing, against the false charges constitutional rights are utilized, against all the schemes of the Devil the church is marching ahead with more passion, wisdom, and strength. The Christians in India are becoming more radical in their practice of faith.

Footnotes:

1. Encyclopedia Britannica, volume-18 (1969), William Benton Publisher, pg. no. 1036
2. Katan Alder, Lecturer in Politics and Religions, Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion, *Lancaster University*. This article was originally published on The Conversation.

The Rev. Samit Mishra serves in our sister church in India, the Presbyterian Free Church of Central India, as a minister in the Chhapara congregation.

The World in the Banner

Christian Physicist Says New Evidence of Africa's Wet Past Points to Biblical Great Flood

New research has confirmed that the dry, desolate climate of the Sahara Desert was once a lush tropical climate—an observation that correlates well with the predictions of biblical creationists, a physicist with the Institute for Creation Research says.

A team of international researchers collected and analyzed marine sediments from off the coast of west Africa, looking for clues into Africa's climatological past. Their findings, published in the journal *Science Advances*, show that northern Africa was at one time much wetter than it is today.

"It was 10 times as wet as today," said the study's lead author, Jessica Tierney, in a press release from The University of Arizona.

Tierney and her colleagues found ancient leaf wax samples that reveal what the African climate was like several thousand years ago.

The evidence suggests that the Sahara Desert, where annual rainfall now is usually less than five inches, was once lush and green.

"Our precipitation rate estimates confirm the interpretation that a seasonal tropical climate dominated most regions of North Africa during the Green Sahara time," the researchers wrote in their paper.

"It is therefore feasible that, at the peak of the Green Sahara, monsoonal moisture inundated the entire western Saharan region," they added.

Although scientists already knew that rainfall rates in ancient Africa were once higher than they are today, most climate model simulations underestimated how widespread the tropical conditions were.

"With some notable exceptions, climate model simulations do not predict these high rainfall rates, nor do they indicate that the Green Sahara extended as far as 31°N," the team wrote in their journal article.

As scientists struggle to make

sense of the new data and adjust their climate models accordingly, biblical creationists say that these findings point to the global flood described in Genesis. Dr. Jake Hebert, a physicist with the Institute for Creation Research, says scientific models based on the Bible predict an extremely wet period following the Great Flood.

"Rapid seafloor spreading and volcanic activity during the Genesis Flood would have significantly warmed the world's oceans," he wrote in an online article published late last month. "This would have greatly increased evaporation, putting much more moisture into the atmosphere. This increased moisture would have resulted in much more precipitation, in the form of snow, in the higher latitudes and on mountaintops, and rain at lower latitudes and elevations."

North Africa is not the only dry region that was once wet and tropical, Hebert pointed out.

However secular models, based primarily on uniformitarianism, struggle to explain the drastic climate changes that the earth experienced several millennia ago.

"This past climate change is difficult for secular scientists to explain," he wrote. "Some uniformitarian scientists claim the wet Green Sahara was caused by changes in Earth's orbital motions (the astronomical or Milankovitch theory of climate change), which caused a small increase in solar radiation some 9,000 years ago. This extra solar radiation supposedly warmed the continents, intensifying summer monsoons over Europe and Africa. But there are serious problems with attributing past climate change to astronomical motions."

The Biblical model accounts for the evidence much better than secular theories, Hebert concluded. "The conclusion of increased Saharan rainfall in the recent past is in perfect agreement with the history recorded in Genesis," he said.

+ <http://christiannews.net/2017/03/06>

Video Series "The English Reformation and the Puritans"

The Christian Institute's special video series on The English Reformation and the Puritans, in collaboration with Ligonier Ministries, is now in its third week.

The current week's episode is on Edward VI and Mary I. With the nine-year-old Edward on the throne, England is poised for an intentional Reformation.

In his twelve-part series, Dr Reeves surveys Puritan theology and the work of the Holy Spirit when the Reformation flourished in England.

Major milestones of this movement underscore the Puritans' special place in history, as they displayed spiritual wisdom and discernment, still benefiting pulpits and believers today.

Access to the video series is available here:

<http://www.christian.org.uk/resources/series/the-english-reformation-and-the-puritans/?e080417>

reformation-and-the-puritans/?e080417

+ *Presbyterian Week*

Christians 'Most Persecuted Group in the World'

In many parts of the world, Christians gathering to celebrate Christ's resurrection do so with the knowledge that any day their faith could cost them their lives as it has for thousands of their brothers and sisters.

On Palm Sunday, twin bombings by jihadists at two Egyptian churches killed at least 45 worshippers and wounded more than 100 others in the latest of a long string of deadly attacks targeting Christians throughout the world.

The attacks were directed specifically to Christian in their houses of worship to avoid any ambiguity regarding the intent. As has been noted, this was "an attack on Christians simply because they are Christians."

On Saturday, the Pakistan military said it has thwarted a "major terrorist attack" against Christians planned for Easter Sunday after a successful overnight raid just hours after Christians celebrated Good Friday services.

On Easter Sunday 2016, an Islamist militant took the lives of more than 70 people and injured over 320 more after detonating his suicide vest in a park in Lahore that was full of Christian families celebrating the feast. Among the victims are more than 30 small children, who at the time of the blast were playing sports and outdoor games in the Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park.

During the last calendar year, some 90,000 Christians were killed for their faith across the globe, making Christians by far the most persecuted group in the world, according to a study from the Turin-based Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR). The director of CESNUR, Dr. Massimo Introvigne, told Breitbart News that whereas atheistic communist regimes were the greatest persecutors of Christians in the last century, "Islamic ultra-fundamentalism"

has taken its place as the number one agent of persecution.

The Center's findings corroborate those of other scholars and human rights groups. According to the 2016 "World Watch List," for example, published by the Open Doors organization, nine out of the top ten countries where Christians suffer "extreme persecution" had populations that are at least 50 percent Muslim.

Their 2016 report revealed that "Islamic extremism is by far the most significant persecution engine" of Christians in the world today and that "40 of the 50 countries on the World Watch List are affected by this kind of persecution." During the year, nearly one-third of the Christians killed for their faith were executed at the hands of Islamic extremists such as the Islamic State or Boko Haram.

While tens of thousands of Christians are killed for their faith, Introvigne said, they are just the tip of the iceberg and much persecution takes place on a daily basis that never makes news. Along with the enormous number of deaths, a great many more Christians—as many as 600 million—were prevented from practicing their faith in 2016.

On Easter 2015, Pope Francis reminded the world that there are more Christian martyrs in the present age than even in the first centuries, when the Roman Empire attempted to eliminate all followers of the nascent religion. Calling for "tangible help in the defense and protection of our brothers and sisters who are persecuted, exiled, killed, and beheaded just for being Christians," Francis told a crowd of tens of thousands in St. Peter's Square that today's martyrs "are more numerous than in the first centuries."

+ *Thomas D. Williams* <http://www.breitbart.com>

Pupil Safety Discarded In Vic Govt's LGBT Activist-Inspired Enrolment Forms

The Victorian Government's encouragement for teens to choose whether they are male, female or an indeterminant gender X on enrolment forms is a capitulation to the rainbow lobby that tells children their gender is fluid and promotes gender confusion among students, warns the Australian Christian Lobby.

ACL Victorian director, Dan Flynn, called for the immediate scrapping of the new enrolment forms for VCE and VCAL pupils which have been altered by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, an authority answerable to the Minister for Education. Mr Flynn said the well-being and safety of other children was being discarded in an attempt to impose "Safe Schools" type policies

on schools.

"As with other contested gender ideology such as Safe Schools, these forms have been forced on schools without parental consultation," Mr Flynn warned. "We are opening the door to say, 'I don't want to be a male or a female, I want to be something else'. Unambiguous biological boys would be able to rely on their official VCAA forms to have free access to girls change rooms at school."

Mr Flynn said Parliament had rejected similar proposed changes to birth certificates that were introduced by the Victorian Government because of concerns for the safety of women. "Why is the Education Department willing to put children in their care at risk when the Parliament has rejected similar changes

to Birth Certificates because of safety concerns for women and children?

"Policies inspired by "Safe Schools" to allow boys identifying as girls to access girls' private spaces such as toilets should be rejected as implementing this policy may open up significant duty of care liabilities for the Victorian Government," Mr Flynn said.

"Reasonable accommodations for children dealing with gender identity issues should be found that do not compromise girls' privacy. It is not reasonable for parents to be required, without their permission, to have their daughters participate in such a social experiment."

+ *Australian Christian Lobby, 22 March 2017*

The Miracles At Calvary

The Violent Earthquake

Matthew 27:51b

Sjirk Bajema

An earthquake isn't really such a unique thing. Having been brought up and lived at various times on the shaky isles, as some call New Zealand, we got the odd tremor or two – or three or four. We have even had the bigger quakes. Napier city was devastated by one in the 1930's. And just recently Christchurch was even more affected by a series of earthquakes, with one in particular decimating the Central Business District and coastal suburbs. Here, on the eastern side of Australia, we're on an earthquake plate as well. I'm sure you've occasionally felt tremors. There was that earthquake that struck Newcastle at the end of 1989. The Middle East is also a similar geological area. That is part of one of those fiery rings, with volcanic activity, earthquakes, and so on. The frequent earthquakes in Turkey show this.

So earthquakes weren't anything the people of Jesus' time didn't know about. They would

have experienced them before. But certainly not on this scale. Why should there be a quake just now, and such a violent one at that? Of all the times that an earthquake had to strike why at this time? And why in this precise place?

There had been so much happening going on at the time when Jesus died. There was that incredible darkness – so heavily black you could feel it! Then there was the loud voice. No one had ever heard someone cry out with that much force after six hours on the cross. At that moment also, the curtain tore from top to bottom. A curtain of the most carefully constructed skill and strength. It was less than fifty years old – while it was made to last for centuries. And it was ripped clean! That curtain was ripped with unearthly strength from top to bottom, in a way that was totally against normal wear and tear.

And then: "The earth shook

and the rocks split." Could this have been a coincidence? Well, as any detective will tell you when investigating a number of very unusual events that have happened at the same time, "There are no such things as coincidences." And how much more so isn't this true, especially at this time? Do you think we can dismiss any of these unusual events we see here as just normal, or coincidence? Definitely not!

This is where our modern, rationalist age can blind us. For in previous centuries, people have been very quick to see something special in these kinds of happenings. And you can still find parts of the world now where people will see a connection. In our society, though, there's a scientific explanation for everything and that blinds us. We can begin to think the answer can be rationally explained, by present day human logic and understand-

ing. And that is something this earthquake is definitely not telling us.

The earthquake proves God's Word is true

For a moment here let's consider how all those other pagan religions in the world see natural disasters, such as earthquakes. What do they mean for them? Well, it's not good news, is it? Their gods are angry. Somehow they have displeased their powerful gods, and this disaster has been sent as a punishment.

In our Christian faith, we know we could never do enough to please God. The Lord reminds us of that often in his Word. But he also tells us we will be accountable for whatever we do. So many Christians view this earthquake as a judgment. They say that God addresses the Jews in their own language – they who looked for signs, as Paul tells us in 1st Corinthians chapter 1, certainly got one! The earthquake to them serves as a 'woe' which heralded an advent, but an advent this time not of Jesus as the Saviour, but of Jesus as the Judge.

The difficulty with this view is that while it is true there is a coming judgment, and there are events which characterise that coming Day, this event is testifying to a different coming. This is a miracle at the end of Christ's first coming, not a catastrophe pointing to the beginning of his second coming. We need to ask, instead, how this represents the saving work of our Lord. And while you will find passages tying in earthquakes with judgment, particularly when Jesus speaks of the time before his second return, you will find even more passages, especially in the Old Testament, describing this particular earthquake as a covenant confirmation.

David pictures such a situation

in Psalm 18. When the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, he used the scene of the earth shaking to show the power which delivered him. The Lord would keep his covenant with his own. Isn't that what we

Matthew 27:45-54

⁴⁵ From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. ⁴⁶ About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" – which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

⁴⁷ When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

⁴⁸ Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. ⁴⁹ But the rest said, "Leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

⁵⁰ And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks split. ⁵² The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³ They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

⁵⁴ When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

read in Exodus chapter 19? When God came down on the Mount of Sinai, and gave Moses the First Word (the Ten Commandments), there was darkness because of the dense cloud, and the whole mountain trembled violently. The sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Would we imagine, then, when God gives his Final Word, that he wouldn't confirm it again in the same way?

The Church today so often forgets the Old Testament. It is treated like a hiccup, an obstacle,

or at best giving a few handy moral lessons. You will find many churches saying that it is completely out of sync with the New Testament and ignoring it in their teaching. They say the Old Testament is all about the Law while the New Testament is all about grace. But when the letter to the Hebrews begins with the words, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways," the writer is describing a line of grace right through to the Messiah who will fulfil the law. What is happening here is nothing new. The Jews had to see and acknowledge that line. That's why Matthew wrote about the earthquake.

Here we can draw in the Berean Christians mentioned in Acts 17:11. They searched intently through their Hebrew Scriptures when the apostle Paul preached to them. And the only scriptures available to them at that time were what today's Christians know as the Old Testament. But what a witness they are! They clearly state who the Messiah is and how we can recognise him.

We read the same in 2nd Peter 1 verse 19. There the apostle says, "...we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

The word of the covenant laid before the people at Mount Sinai was fulfilled in the One on the cross at the Mount of Calvary. He was the man greater than Moses. He was not to be left outside the Promised Land, but he went all the way in. The majesty of Christ rests on the Mount. In the further words of Hebrews 1, in verse 3, "The

Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word."

This is no coincidence. The unique features of this particular earthquake prove that it was sent by God to proclaim the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.

The rocks splitting are also a confirmation of prophecy

Seismologically speaking, there are tremors occurring all the time. The real worry is that big one. And it's certainly coming. Japan experienced a vivid example of such a quake in 2011. That was a 9 on the Richter scale! And how many didn't perish as a result of that – not to begin counting the huge property damage bill! That is the kind of quake that splits rocks. For a tremor will move them round a little, but to actually split rocks takes a very powerful force.

It's interesting, then, that the words for 'shook' and 'split' in our text are passive in the original Greek. So this is something which is done to the earth and to the rocks. And the One who does it to them is certainly no mere man. This is no early experimentation in underground explosions. Those rocks split at God's command.

Some see this as the fulfilment of what Jesus said in Luke 19:40. In reply to the Pharisees who were condemning the disciples for praising him, Jesus said there, "I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." But while these stones were now crying out their confirmation it's not because the disciples weren't any longer praising him, even though at this point most of them had deserted him.

There is a connection, however, because any genuine response to God's grace in Jesus Christ cannot be stopped. It will come out. Nothing can stop the effects of the great victory Christ has won – the "Amen" will be sung! In the words of the apostle

Paul in 2nd Corinthians 1:20, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God."

As a biblical miracle, the earth shaking and the rocks splitting are tied in with what Jesus Christ is doing. This sign appears because the great Sign is present. It points to what is happening to him there and then. And you know why he's there!

It comes home to us all. None of us can get away from the fact that this miracle is testifying of Christ's dying for his own on the cross. Therefore each one of us is asked this: 'Are the shock waves hitting you?' You know they ought to – you know they won't skip past you. These are not little tremors – this gigantic quake shakes your whole life through and through!

Look at a few verses further down. Verse 54 leaves us in no doubt the way this has to strike human hearts. As Matthew writes there, "When the centurion, and those with him who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake, and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, 'Surely he was the Son of God!'"

The power that splits even the hardest rocks is shocking them, too. They can't get away from it. This miracle is a true miracle – because it's got the message! The Gospel is being shouted out! And they're hearing it – loud and clear! The hardest rocks of all – their hearts – are being broken!

With this covenant confirmation, God's people should be in no doubt. The Lord himself has come down. And now through his doing and dying, his people are empowered to break through. While under the old covenant Moses and Aaron were the

only people allowed to communicate with the Lord, now he himself opens the way for us all to come through. There's nothing holding us back because Christ's Spirit lives in us.

The believer's victory

What for anyone else is a disaster becomes the believer's victory. What reminds them of judgment for their sin points us to being free from that sin forever. The earth shaking and the rocks splitting proclaim creation's joyful response to our triumphant Lord, whose victory over Satan has changed the world forever. It is not the same any more.

While Israel knew what they had to do, their history constantly showed that they couldn't do it. Their sacrifices were never enough. Having God's Law before them only proved that they could never manage to keep it as they should. But now it is all done. Jesus Christ, Lord of all creation, is God's one and only Son.

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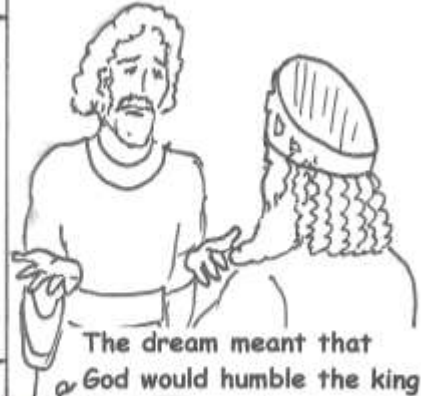
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Children under the Banner — Daniel 4

Pride
Comes Before
A Fall

King Nebuchadnezzar dreamt
about a huge tree that was
cut down!



The dream meant that
God would humble the king.

Exactly one year later King Nebuchadnezzar was looking out
from his roof top.



"How wonderful Babylon is,
I have built it by my power and for my glorious majesty!"

Immediate he lost his mind.
He ate grass like an animal,



his hair grew long like
eagle's feathers,

and his nails were like claws.



After a long time his
sanity was restored.



Then King Nebuchadnezzar
praised God.

Prescribed Search Work

JUNE 2017

Senior Section 12 years and over; Intermediate 10—11 years; Junior 9 years and under

SENIOR AND INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 3 and 6)

1 SAMUEL chapter 15

1. Why did the Lord say he repented [regretted] that he had made Saul king?
2. In Samuel's answer to Saul, what did he say was better than sacrifice and the fat of rams?
3. Did Saul and Samuel ever meet again?

Chapter 16

4. Among whose sons had the Lord provided a king?
5. What was the Lord's answer when Samuel thought Eliab was the Lord's anointed?
6. After David's anointing, how were David and Saul both changed? (2 verses)
7. When Saul asked for a man who could play the harp well, whom did his servant suggest?
8. What was Saul's reaction when he saw David?

JUNIOR

MARK chapter 7:24—8:10

1. How did Jesus heal the man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech? (3 verses)
2. How many people ate of the seven loaves and the few small fish?

Chapter 8:27--38

3. What did Jesus say when Peter took him and began to rebuke him?

4. Of whom will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in glory?

Please send the answers to:
Mrs I Steel
PO Box 942
Epping NSW 1710
The questions for the whole year
are available from the above postal
address or by email at:
iesteel@gmail.com

Synod in the Banner

The 170th Annual Meeting of the Synod of Eastern Australia met from May 2nd to May 4th at the Hawkesbury-Nepean congregation church building in Mt Druitt. The retiring Moderator, the Rev. David Kerridge preached on Revelation 2:1-7, with application for the church at Ephesus also applied to us today in the shape of 'The Good News', 'The Bad News', 'The Warning', and 'The Reward'. A number of visiting delegates were associated.

The Rev. Dr Dennis Muldoon was confirmed as the incoming moderator. He then read Genesis 1 and delivered an address on "The Bible & Science: Conflict & Compromise".

Dennis gave two further devotional addresses based on 1st Corinthians 1:18-25, developing a theme on the Wednesday and Thursday mornings tying the wisdom of the world in relation to the Jews (Wednesday) and the Gentiles (Thursday).

The Synod proceeded to deal with the various committee reports and correspondence before it. Amongst these was the Law & Advisory Committee of whose deliverances approved we may here note:

2. The PCEA regards solemnizing a marriage between people of the same sex as contrary to Scripture, the Confession of Faith and the vows of office-bearers. The PCEA requires of those who solemnize marriages in her [the Church's] name that the public preliminaries to the vows include a statement of the basis of Christian marriage as ordained by God as a union of a man and a woman, voluntarily entered into, for life until dissolved by death or by divorce on grounds founded on the Word of God;

8. The following changes be made forthwith to the Application for Recognition as a

Student/Candidate for the Ministry:

a. Section 7 Family: insert note "The PCEA believes that the Scriptures prohibit the practice of homosexuality and so does not admit practising homosexuals to office nor permit homosexual marriage (so called)."

Following this, Synod dealt with the report of the Training of Ministry Committee. Involved in this was a meeting with Duncan Hickey, where we could express our thankfulness for his studies and training thus far and lay him before the Lord in prayer. Positive reports were received regarding the first of two student internship periods in the last two years of study (Candidate Placement Scheme) for Duncan. The Eldership Training Course is also progressing and its further development will be considered at our next Synod.

Under the Church & Nation Report there was thankfulness that official marriage was still between a man and a woman, and the Conventor will write to our Prime Minister supporting this. Under *The Presbyterian Banner* report there was discussion around the continuation of a hard copy being printed, for which there was much support. As subscriptions are dropping for the printed versions, churches and individuals were encouraged to give donations to support this aspect of our church life. Attached to this was the Website report which outlined promising development on our internet site, while our Web Master encouraged us all to greater involvement in it. Under the Archivist report Synod expressed its thanks to Mr Robert Hingston of the Ulverstone congregation for his detailed and painstaking work in scanning historical denominational magazine.

A number of delegates were present from other churches – the Rev (and Mrs) Bruce Backensto from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), the Rev John (and Mrs) Forbes from the Free Church of Scotland, Elder Graeme Mitchell from the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia (PRCA), and the Rev Ian Hall from the Southern Presbyterian Church of Australia (SPCA). We were delighted to have them with us. All these delegates gave brief presentations regarding their various denominations and it was a helpful insight into their blessings and struggles.

The mission's evening saw four presentations take place. In the first

of these Miss Vida Jurkovic spoke of the Lithuanian Christian Literature Ministries, a non-profit organisation for the translation, publishing and sale of reformed literature in Lithuania. Mariam Hussain gave a moving and inspiring presentation of her ministry amongst poor Muslim children (Taleem Centres in north India), following in her father's footsteps. A mother and daughter team, Becky and Emma Graham, gave an encouraging and insightful presentation into the work and world of Mukti, which they were able to visit in conjunction with the Mission Awareness Tour. And then the Rev. Trevor Leggett spoke of the work of Australian Indigenous Ministries (AIM) – the gospel work being done with aborigines in the Northern Territory, Queensland and western New South Wales. He spoke frankly of difficulties that had arisen from the past, but also of plans for the future, particularly with ongoing discussions with the Pioneer Missionary Agency. He expressed the relief of AIM that the court case was able to be settled regarded a historical matter related to a children's home in the Northern Territory.

We were thankful for the ongoing work being done under the auspices of the Youth & Fellowship Committee. Under them there is the children's work in *The Presbyterian Banner* and the organisation of the biennial Family Camp, together with a Youth Camp at Easter in MacLean for the first time in some years. A number of our young people took up the offer of the Youth and Fellowship Committee to provide financial assistance of \$500 per person for young persons interested in seeing the activities of God and the church in Central India at the end of 2016. The trip was led by Elder John Greensill (Brisbane) and the Rev Dennis Muldoon (Hawkesbury Nepean). On their return they were able to give an account of their travels at the Family Camp, held in Sydney from 3-6 January 2017. Under this Committee's deliverances we note here:

1. Synod recognises the importance of giving special attention to children and youth in the Church and commits to keep praying for the work of Sunday school teachers and youth leaders, serving God in our local congregations.

2. Synod thanks Mrs Margaret Kinder and Mrs Irene Steel for their dedication to create new and fun ways for children to learn the truths of the gospel.

3. In addition to the responsibilities of shepherding God's flock, Synod members are also invited to enthusiastically encourage church members to participate in future Family Camps and Youth Camps.

4. Members of Synod commit themselves to keep praying for the spiritual development of our children and youth in the church. Synod is conscious of the danger of moving away from the faith; therefore, constant intercession will be made on behalf of our youth so that they will have the courage to resist secular pressure, find their identity in fellowship with Christ, and participate with glad involvement in their local

churches.

5. Synod thanks God for the success and blessings and fellowship of the Mission Awareness Tour to India and the 2017 Family Camp and the 2017 Youth Camp.

The Mission Committee were thankful to continue the causes they support in South America, Central India, South Africa, and here in Australia through the Rev. Trevor Leggott's work with AIM. Trevor is looking towards retiring from his role as the General Director of AIM at the end of this year.

The following morning Rev. Tut Yoa spoke of the sad situation in South Sudan, where it is evident that in a land of 64 tribes one tribe rules them all in the most brutal and barbaric way. Much as they may claim to be Christian, that is not the lifestyle being shown by them. We must be very much in prayer for them.

Money matters – that is, Superannuation, Finance, and the various State Trust Corporations took up the further part of the last morning of Synod. The membership of the various Synodical Committees was also

allocated with a number of changes to Committee convenors and the make-up of various committees.

A highlight – once again! – of the Synod meeting was the exceptional hospitality and catering provided by the Hawkesbury Nepean (Mt Druiitt) congregation. A good number of the congregation is from the Tongan community led by Elder Sekona Latu, and this group is exceptionally gifted in both catering and singing. They are a joy to fellowship with. Synod will meet Lord willing next year at Taree, with the Manning River congregation as our hosts. The Rev. Tut Yoa was chosen as the moderator elect.

And as for the other events of the Synod of 2017, are they not written in the book of the annals of the Synods of the PCEA? (These are also known as the Minutes and should be up on the website soon.)

From top right clockwise: Two of our very capable helpers; Trevor Leggott chatting with the Forbes family; Elder Graeme Mitchell (PRCA); Robin Tso presenting the Superannuation Report; 'Brothers in arms' - Glen & Ian Hamilton; the generous provisions; the Mission's Night Dinner.





From top left clockwise: Our Synodical Treasurer, Alex Steel; our Moderator, Dennis Muldoon; the wonderful choir singing Tongan songs; the Mukti presentation from Becky & Emma Graham; the visiting ladies at Synod—Mrs Kim Backensto, Mrs Connie Dekter, Mrs Anna Ward, Mrs Elizabeth Yoa & Miss Mariam Hussain; Miss Vida Jurkovic speaking of the Lithuanian Literature Mission; Fellowship over afternoon tea.



From left to right: Elder D.A. McIntosh; Rev. S. Bajema; Elders A.H. Steel, T.M. Reeve, R. Campbell, J. Dekter; Rev's R.S. Ward, D.P. Smith, J. Forbes (FCS), D.J. Kerridge, I. Hall (SPCA), T.W. Yoa; Elder D. P. T. Manly; Rev's J.A. McCallum, A.A. Miranda, D.K. Muldoon; Elders I. Hamilton, S. Carswell; Rev's B. Backensto (RPCNA), R. Tso; Elder G. Hamilton; Student D. Hickey; Rev. G.D. Ball; Elder S. Latu; Rev. T. Leggott.