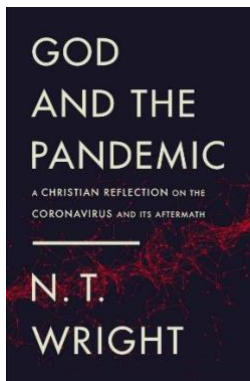


God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and Its Aftermath (by N. T. Wright)

Zondervan, June 2020, 96 Pages

Summary



In this book you will discover a different way of seeing and responding to the Coronavirus pandemic, an approach drawing on Scripture, Christian history, and the way of living, thinking, and praying revealed to us by Jesus. What are we supposed to think about the Coronavirus crisis? N. T. Wright examines various common Christian reactions to the virus and finds them wanting. Instead, he shows that a careful reading of the Bible and Christian history offers simple though profound answers to our many questions.

Best Illustration

“Retired doctors and nurses have come back into the front line. Some have themselves caught the virus and died. They are doing what the early Christians did in times of plague. In the first few centuries of our era, when serious sickness would strike a town or city, the well-to-do would run for the hills (part of the problem was often low-lying, fetid air in a town). The Christians would stay and nurse people. Sometimes they caught the disease and died. People were astonished.” Kindle location 112

Best Idea

“We are simply to know that when we are caught up in awful circumstances, apparent gross injustices, terrible plagues – or when we are accused of wicked things of which we are innocent, suffering strange sicknesses with no apparent reason, let alone cure – at those points we are to lament, we are to complain, we are to state the case, and leave it with God.” Kindle location 266

Best Take Away

“It means that, when the world is going through great convulsions, the followers of Jesus are called to be people of prayer at the place where the world is in pain. Paul puts it like this, in a three-stage movement: first, the groaning of the world; second, the groaning of the Church; third, the groaning of the Spirit – within the Church within the world. This is the ultimate answer, I think, to those who want to say that the present Coronavirus crisis is a clear message from God which we can at once decode, either as a sign of the End, a call to repent, or simply an opportunity for a standard kind of evangelism.” Kindle location 666

Our Recommendation

There is much currently being written about the what and why of the current COVID pandemic. It can be confusing wading through all the opinions, both Christian and secular, as to how to view our current circumstance. That is why you will find this book, that takes a through-the- Scriptures biblical view on the pandemic, grounding our thoughts in God’s revelation, so helpful.

Best Quotes

“The aim of this book, then, is not to offer ‘solutions’ to the questions raised by the pandemic, to give any sort of complete analysis of what we might learn from it, or what we ought now to do. My main argument is precisely that we need to resist the knee-jerk reactions that come so readily to mind. Before we can answer those questions in anything other than the broadest outline, we need a time of lament, of restraint, of precisely not jumping to ‘solutions.’” Kindle location 64

“In most of the ancient world, and many parts of the modern world too, major disasters (earthquakes, volcanoes, fires, plagues) are regularly associated with angry gods. Something bad has happened? Must be because ‘someone’ has it in for you. In the old pagan world of Greece and Rome, the assumption was that you hadn’t offered the right sacrifices; or you hadn’t said the right prayers; or you did something so truly dreadful that even the old amoral gods on Mount Olympus felt it was time to crack down on you.” Kindle location 95

“Actually, the best answer I’ve heard in the last few weeks has not been to the question ‘Why?’ It’s been to the question, ‘What?’” Kindle location 109

“The COVID-19 crisis has, in fact, done to the whole world what Hurricane Katrina did in 2005 for New Orleans: in its devastating impact, it shows that the political and social timbers have already been rotting away.” Kindle location 137

“The place to begin is with the Old Testament. That’s where some of the apparently key texts can be found. Of course, this raises a big question of interpretation. Can we make a straight transfer, or at least a dynamic analogy, from what some wonderful but scary people said in the eighth century BC to our muddled and frightened world in the twenty-first century AD?” Kindle location 155

“We sometimes have the impression that the coronavirus is providing people with a megaphone with which to say, more loudly, what they were wanting to say anyway.” Kindle location 163

“Try explaining to someone dying of coronavirus in a crowded refugee camp that all this is because of sin. Blame the victim, in other words. That’s always a popular line.” Kindle location 205

“Whenever anyone tells you that coronavirus means that God is calling people – perhaps you! – to repent, tell them to read Job. The whole point is that that is not the point.” Kindle location 235

“The book of Job rattles the cages of our easy-going piety. It reminds us that there are indeed more things in heaven and earth – more pains and puzzles in heaven and earth – than are dreamed of in our philosophy. Even our ‘Christian’ philosophy.” Kindle location 239

“Jesus, in other words, doesn’t look back to a hypothetical cause which would enable the onlookers to feel smug that they had understood some inner cosmic moral mechanism, some sin that God had had to punish. He looks forward to see what God is going to do about it. That translates directly into what he, Jesus, is going to do about it.” Kindle location 308

“In this ‘Lord’s Prayer’ Jesus-followers pray, not just when a sudden global crisis occurs, but every single day, ‘Thy kingdom come, on earth as in heaven’. They also pray, every day, not simply when a horrible event acts as a trigger, ‘Forgive us our trespasses.’” Kindle location 327

“Praying those two prayers – the kingdom-prayer, the forgiveness-prayer – might just alert us to the real anti-kingdom forces at work in our world, our real ‘trespasses’ (against one another, in our political systems; against the natural world and particularly the animal kingdom, in our farming and food-chain systems) of which we should have repented long ago.” Kindle location 330

“In a sense, learning to follow Jesus is simply learning to pray the Lord’s Prayer.” Kindle location 337

“The New Testament insists that we put Jesus at the centre of the picture and work outwards from there. The minute we find ourselves looking at the world around us and jumping to conclusions about God and what he might be doing, but without looking carefully at Jesus, we are in serious danger of forcing through an ‘interpretation’ which might look attractive – it might seem quite ‘spiritual’ and awe-inspiring – but which actually screens Jesus out of the picture.” Kindle location 344

“Trying to jump from an earthquake, a tsunami, a pandemic or anything else to a conclusion about ‘what God is saying here’ without going through the Gospel story is to make the basic

theological mistake of trying to deduce something about God while going behind Jesus' back." Kindle location 375

"The point is this. If you want to know what it means to talk about God being 'in charge of' the world, or being 'in control', or being 'sovereign', then Jesus himself instructs you to rethink the notion of 'kingdom', 'control' and 'sovereignty' themselves, around his death on the cross." Kindle location 430

"I suggest, then, that from the time of Jesus onwards we see Jesus' followers telling people about God's kingdom, and summoning them to repent, not because of any subsequent events such as famines or plagues but because of Jesus himself." Kindle location 590

"The thing above all which the Church should be doing at the present time is praying. But this is a strange prayer indeed. Here we are, at the heart of one of the most glorious chapters in Scripture, and here is Paul saying we don't know what to pray for as we ought. We are at a loss! He implies that this isn't something we ought to be ashamed of. It is the natural place to be." Kindle location 688

"That is our vocation: to be in prayer, perhaps wordless prayer, at the point where the world is in pain." Kindle location 711

"So the encouragement and comfort here in Romans 8.28 doesn't amount to a kind of Stoic resignation. It is a call to recognize the truth of what Paul says elsewhere: that we are called to hard work, knowing that God is at work in us. That work, it seems, takes place not least through suffering with the Messiah in order to share his 'image-bearing' human 'glory'." Kindle location 782

"I have urged that we should embrace lament as the vital initial Christian response to this pandemic. Roughly one-third of the Psalms are lamenting that things are not as they should be. The words they use are words of complaint: of question, sorrow, anger and frustration and, often enough, bitterness." Kindle location 804

"Are we then looking for fresh reasons to leave our comfortable lifestyles and tell our neighbours the good news? Well, shame on us if it takes a pandemic to get us to that point. Why wasn't Jesus' command enough? 'As the father sent me, so I'm sending you'; 'Go and make all nations into disciples'." Kindle location 811

"Out of lament must come fresh action. At the very least, clergy (properly trained, authorized and protectively clothed) must be allowed to attend the sick and dying. If, as sometimes seems to be the case, secular doctors suppose that such ministry is superfluous, this must be challenged at every level." Kindle location 982

"Part of the answer to that prayer, as many have seen, might be to recognize the present moment as a time of exile. We find ourselves 'by the waters of Babylon', thoroughly confused

and grieving for the loss of our normal life. ‘How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?’, as in Psalm 137, translates quite easily into ‘How can I know the joy of the Eucharist sitting in front of a computer?’ Or ‘How can I celebrate Ascension or Pentecost without being with my brothers and sisters?’” Kindle location 1076

“In all this, I return to the theme of Lament. It is perhaps no accident that Psalm 72, setting out the messianic agenda which puts the poor and needy at the top of the list, is followed immediately by Psalm 73, which complains that the rich and powerful are getting it their own way as usual. Perhaps that is how we are bound to live: glimpsing what ought to be, then struggling with the way things actually are.” Kindle location 1137