

# News from Bible Society

*Transmission* is provided free by Bible Society as part of our mission to equip the church to live out the Bible's message. We also work creatively and with passion to show that the Bible resonates with issues today – and to make Scriptures available where there are none.

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Deputy Chief Executive



As I have read the articles in this edition of *The Bible in Transmission*, I have been struck again by the fact that the Covid-19 crisis has brought about both challenges and opportunities. The extent to which the effects of the crisis permanently reshape our world will only become clear with the passing of time. It is crucial that we learn lessons from what has happened and do not simply revert to the way things were before the pandemic.

Throughout history, infectious diseases are the leading cause of premature death. I have recently had cause to re-read Rodney Stark's book *The Rise of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997) and have been reminded that the early Christians had to deal with diseases that had high mortality rates. For example, an epidemic of smallpox infected the Roman Empire in 165 AD. A second new and equally devastating plague, possibly measles, swept the Empire less than 100 years later. Even in such difficult circumstances, the Christian movement continued to grow. Why? Stark gives three reasons. Firstly, Christianity offered a more satisfactory account of the world – and a better hope for the future – than the dominant pagan and Hellenic philosophies of the day. Secondly, Christian values of love and charity were 'translated' into social service and community solidarity: they took care of the sick and vulnerable. Christianity was a 'revitalising movement' as it helped mobilise people to attempt collective actions, such as the provision of food and water to those who were not well enough to look after themselves. Thirdly, during the epidemic people lost the 'social bonds' that had previously discouraged them from rebelling against prevailing (pagan) ideologies and embracing the gospel.

Stark notes that frequently in human history, crises produced by natural disasters have translated into crises of faith where the religion of the day is considered inadequate because it has

been unable to confront the reality of people's life-experience. In response to these failures of religion, societies often look elsewhere and adopt new faiths.

These themes find resonance in the current situation. So, how has Bible Society been responding to the changing missional landscape in the UK?

In the space of a couple of weeks, we produced three films engaging with the pandemic and the events of Easter to help people consider how the Bible can bring comfort, wisdom and hope. These films reached thousands of people. At a point when the spread of Covid-19 was increasing rapidly, these videos told the story of God and the world and offered hope in, not escapism from, the situation. You can view these films on our website, [www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/the-bible-and-coronavirus/](http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/the-bible-and-coronavirus/)

Similarly, Theos has been producing some outstanding podcasts about Christianity in the world today. The podcast is called 'The Sacred' and is presented by Theos' Director, Elizabeth Oldfield. For more information please visit [www.theosthinktank.co.uk/](http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/)

Bible Society has also been standing in solidarity with our colleagues around the world as they deal with the effects of the virus. The long-term effects may be devastating for African and Middle Eastern economies, putting our mission in the poorest nations at risk. We have been working to support those who cannot benefit from government bailouts and furlough support to help keep their doors open.

People are using the opportunity of lockdown to evaluate what is important and consider life's big questions. We have detected a greater appetite for engaging with Scripture, with some people engaging with the Bible for the first time. We have been trying to respond to appropriately and sensitively to this situation. For example, we have adapted *The Bible Course* into a digital

format suitable for online small group or family settings. From the comfort of your home you can now explore how the key events, books and characters Bible fit together as part of one big story. For more information please visit [www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/the-bible-course/](http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/the-bible-course/)

In June, we ran a webinar following the online National Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast. Entitled 'Mission during lockdown and beyond', the webinar aimed to support and encourage church leaders as they engage in mission in a lockdown and post-lockdown context. If you are interested in watching the seminar, you can view it on our YouTube channel. Do also remember to visit [lumino.bible](http://lumino.bible) to find out more about what people (nationally and in your constituency) think about the Bible and resources to support Bible engagement.

One of the great responses from churches during the lockdown has been the huge rise in the number of online/livestream services taking place on Sundays. To support church leaders, Bible Society is building a bank of video resources for churches to use online. Initial content is now available, with more to come in the future. More information is available at [www.biblesociety.org.uk](http://www.biblesociety.org.uk).

The staff at Bible Society have been praying for you and all our supporters during this period. We remain hopeful and are deeply grateful for your ongoing support.

'We put our hope in the LORD; he is our protector and our help. We are glad because of him; we trust in his holy name' (Psalm 33.20–21, GNB).