

What Does God's Word Say About... Disease, Pestilence, and Plagues

God gave Adam and Eve one commandment: "but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die" (Gen 2: 16-17). The serpent lied to Eve before she ate the forbidden fruit saying "you surely shall not die" and "your eyes will be opened and you will be like God". The woman saw that the tree was "desirable to make one wise" and she took and ate and gave also to her husband with her, and he ate (Gen 3: 2-6). Man has always wanted to be their own god relying on our own fleshly wisdom. Because of Adam and Eve's sin in the garden even the creation was subject to futility (Romans 8:19-21). The moment Adam and Eve sinned they died spiritually, "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). Adam eventually died physically at the age of 930 years (Gen. 5:5). Sin causes a separation between God and man (Gen. 3:24; Isa. 59:2). The "free gift of God is eternal life IN Christ" (Romans 6:23b). Only those who are IN Christ can spend eternal life in heaven (Gal. 3:27-29; Col. 2:11-14). Jesus said only those "who do the will of My Father" will enter heaven. One must be obedient to ALL of His commandments (2 Cor. 2:9).

Most people are concerned, worried, and anxious due to the virus infection called COVID-19. Mankind places more emphasis on what can cause us to die physically when we should be more concerned about the eternal destruction of our soul in hell due to sin that is not forgiven. Spiritual sickness should be more of a concern than our physical sickness when our sins have not been forgiven (Matt. 7:13-14, 22-23; Acts 2:38, 22:16).

Whether we are talking about a pandemic that threatens our physical health and lives, or the universality of sin that threatens our spiritual health, we need to have the right perspective. James reminds us life is uncertain and brief and that we must first depend on God instead of ourselves (James 4:13-15). This perspective prompts us to do the will of God instead of arrogantly thinking that mankind can find a solution to sickness, making it possible to live forever in the flesh (James 4:16-17). Whenever a new disease or plague comes we think that through our own wisdom we can help men live forever with a new vaccine. Christians understand "to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21). Christians understand this life in the flesh is temporal (2 Cor. 4:16-18). Perhaps this partially explains the difference between a panicked reaction and prudent precaution in times of crisis. Faith convinces those who are IN Christ to live with an eternal perspective.

Every day presents the possibility that we could die of a disease, an auto accident, or because of someone else's sin. No matter how healthy we are, or how we take care of our bodies, the wise words of Solomon ring true: "I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all. Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them" (Eccl. 9:11-12). Solomon is saying the issues and length of life are quite unpredictable. No one can guarantee success or foresee how God will deal with him.

We live in a world where there is such a thing as being at the right place at the right time and being at the wrong place at the wrong time. It is also possible to be at the wrong place at the

right time and the right place at the wrong time. "Time and chance" comes upon everyone. Jesus gave an example of time and chance when there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices: "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?" (Luke 13:4-5). This tower was evidently near the pool of Siloam which was near the foot of Mt. Zion. There were large porches around the pool where many lay. On some occasion a building had fallen upon certain innocent persons who the people at that time were familiar with. The point that Jesus makes is that they had perished not simply because of their wickedness. Jesus warned that they should repent. This means we should be ready and prepared to die even if death comes unexpectedly. Recently there was a terrible tornado that destroyed sections of middle Tennessee. Innocent people were either hurt or died, and the pain came closer to fellow believers when a Christian family of four was caught in the storm, losing their lives. Tragic times often cause us to ask "why" when innocent people die. That is why heaven is a prepared place (John 14:2) for a prepared people (Matthew 25:1-13).

God also has reason to judge humanity due to its wickedness. Solomon prayed to God that "If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence, if there is blight or mildew, locusts or grasshopper, if their enemy besieges them in the land of their cities, whatever plague, whatever sickness there is...that You would forgive Your people who have sinned against You and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against You." When Solomon finished this prayer the Lord appeared to him and said, "But if you or your sons shall indeed turn away from following Me, and shall not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you and shall go and serve other gods and worship them...your house will become a heap of ruins; everyone who passes by will be astonished and hiss and say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?' And they will say, 'Because they forsook the Lord their God.' ...therefore, the Lord has brought all this adversity on them" (1 Kings 8-37, 9:6-9).

Though we should not presume God's intention through this pandemic, certainly God's providence rules and He has reason to judge humanity. Prior to this pandemic, America has murdered 3,000 babies every day through abortion (far more than COVID-19 does). Sexual immorality is running rampant with the LGBT movement. As a culture we have largely abandoned God's word as a standard for right and wrong and have replaced it with humanism. It is easy to see why God would judge a wicked world. God does not withhold His righteous anger forever. All sin is ultimately a direct offense to Him. The apostle Paul wrote, "indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (2 Cor. 1:9).

Yes, we need to be concerned about our physical health. But, what about our spiritual health? Are you distancing yourself from the sickness of sin? Are you washing your heart like you are washing your hands? (James 4:7-10). Are you being obedient to God's word to protect yourself against sin and the schemes of the devil? Or, are you dying spiritually?

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