

## Is This Pandemic a Sign of the End-Times?

Earlier this month, our volunteer group, Hesed left for Israel with great hope and anticipation until the coronavirus pandemic caught up with them. Shortly after arriving in Israel prepared to serve at Kaplan Medical Center in Rehovot, the hospital informed them they could not work because they hadn't been quarantined for 14 days.

Several days later, Israel announced that everyone entering the country had to comply with a 14-day in-home quarantine, which forced us to cancel our spring *Up to Jerusalem* Israel tour, amid great disappointment.

### **Judgment: National or Global?**

At the end of that week, I spoke at one of our Prophecy Up Close conferences, and the question on many minds was "How does the coronavirus pandemic relate to Scripture?" Some people wondered if it is God's judgment on the United States for the recently announced Israeli-Arab peace plan that cedes land belonging to Israel to the Arabs for a Palestinian state.

Since the coronavirus is a global epidemic that began in China and spread around the world, it seems unlikely to be a judgment on the United States. But I do believe the Bible can help us understand it better.

### **Pandemics in Scripture**

In the Bible, pestilence is never portrayed as a random or naturally occurring phenomenon. It is always seen as a judgment or punishment by God. *Pestilence* by definition is a contagious, epidemic disease of devastating proportions that leads to a high mortality rate and widespread panic. The word literally means "destruction."

God warned Israel that He would bring a judgment of pestilence on the Jewish people if they failed to obey Him and keep His law (Lev. 26:25; Dt. 28:21–22). The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel frequently announce a pestilence on Israel as God's judgment for the Israelites' disobedience. The psalmist declared that those who are faithful to God will be protected from pestilence (Ps. 91:1–3).

However, epidemics were not limited to Israel. God also used them to judge individuals, families, and nations. When the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and carried it to their town of Ashdod, God brought fatal tumors on them (1 Sam. 5:1–6). It's sad to note that when the Philistines returned the Ark to the Israelite village of Beth Shemesh, 50,070 Jewish men became afflicted by God with the same disease and died because they looked inside the holy Ark (6:19).

### **How Do We Respond?**

In Scripture, the appropriate response to pestilence was to turn away from sin and pray for God's forgiveness, not to try to stamp out the affliction. When the Israelites spoke against God and Moses, God sent fiery serpents that killed many of them. The people prayed to God for forgiveness, rather than trying to kill the snakes (Num. 21:4–9).

Pestilence is also spoken of in the New Testament as a sign. Jesus warned that pestilence would afflict the earth prior to His return (Mt. 24:7; Lk. 21:11) and referred to it as the beginning of birth pangs. Jesus was likely speaking in this passage of the judgments God will unleash on the world during the first half of the 70th Week of Daniel (Dan. 9:27).

### **What Is God Telling Us?**

It is amazing how one tiny virus, too small to be seen with the naked eye, can bring the world to its knees. From a biblical viewpoint, the coronavirus that is impacting so many lives on this planet in one way or another is a message to humanity to repent. It is God's nature to warn mankind, and pestilence is one way to get people's attention and remind them who it is they should fear.

Scripture tells us, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near" (Isa. 55:6). Now is the time to share with people that Jesus is coming soon and that they can pray to God for forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Trusting in Him,

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