

If Coronavirus Is an End-Times Sign, We Shouldn't Be Surprised

The first 195 Americans evacuated from Wuhan, China, amid the deadly coronavirus outbreak, were released last Tuesday after a two-week quarantine at March Air Reserve Base in Southern California.

However, over 400 additional evacuees from Wuhan remain under federal quarantine. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has now confirmed 15 cases of the infectious coronavirus microbe, now named "COVID-19" in the United States, combining the virus with "disease" and the year it was discovered, while avoiding attaching it to the country from which it has promulgated.

All of which raises the question to some, "What does the Bible say about pandemic diseases or sicknesses?" For that matter, "why does God allow—or even cause—pandemic diseases, and are such illnesses signs of the end times?"

The Old Testament describes numerous occasions when God brought certain diseases or plagues on His people and on His enemies "to show in you my power" (Exodus 9:14, 16).

Pharaoh was forced to free the descendants of Jacob (Israel) from slavery by the plagues God heaped on the Egyptians, indicating His sovereign control over the pagan gods of Egypt.

Meanwhile, His people were unaffected by the diseases and other afflictions as long as they were obedient to the divine healing covenant God made with them (Ex. 12:13). He promised those who obey His word to be their Healer (*Yahweh-Rapha*, the Lord who heals) and *recover* them to health and to *sustain* them in health (15:26).

Even those who are called by God's name may be brought to experience God's punishments of natural calamities, droughts, pestilences or plagues. All these can have the purpose of bringing the erring children of God to repentance and restoration.

The familiar promises of God in 2 Chronicles 7:14 to forgive sins and "heal their land" is preceded in verse 13 with a review of resources for repentance and restoration: "When I shut up the heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land or send pestilence on my people."

Our heavenly Father may initiate negative circumstances—even plagues and diseases—to draw His people to Himself. Or He might just remove His hand of protection and allow the negative consequences of personal choices and our living in a broken and fallen world.

The New Testament Gospels reveal Christ's compassion for those impacted by sin and sickness. Matthew reminds us that Jesus healed "every sickness and every disease," as well as exercising authority over unclean spirits in the areas He visited (Matt. 9:35, 10:1; Mark 3:10).

We must remember that God is sovereign and all-powerful. He will cause all things to "work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

However, Jesus related to His disciples that future "famines and pestilences" will be part of the signs of the times and end of the age (Luke 21:11). Communicable diseases and certain pandemics (not unlike Ebola and the coronavirus) may be expected in our broken world during the last days (as in Rev. 18:4-8), but "it will turn out for you as a testimony for you" (Luke 21:13).

The book of Revelation details (in somewhat mystical, often apocalyptic language) the events of the last days, with its

three sets of major judgments, known as the seal judgments, the trumpet judgments and the bowl judgments.

During the middle (trumpet) judgments, “two witnesses” are described in Revelation 11 as having power “to shut heaven, that it may not rain during the days of their prophecy. They have power over waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every plague as often as they desire.” (Revelation 11:6).

Also, during these future last days, seven angels will wield seven plagues in a series of final, severe (bowl) judgments, described in Revelation 16. During these climactic days, hardened sinners will still blaspheme the name of God, “who has power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give Him glory” (v. 9b).

Disease and death will be increasingly common in the last days as we await our Lord’s return. We live in a fallen world, and life is tenuous. It can be lost at any moment.

None of us are guaranteed tomorrow. Rather, as the old gospel song said,

“Many things about tomorrow I don’t seem to understand/ But, I know Who holds tomorrow, and I know Who holds my hand.”

In fact, the longer we live in this old world of disease and death and approach the uncertainties of the last days, the more we long for and desire to be at home with our Lord!

Pastor Jack Hayford composed a short song, several decades ago, expressing that heavenly desire:

*Come on down, Lord Jesus, and take us away/ Come on down,
Lord Jesus, could this be the day?*

Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus, we pray/ Come on down,
Lord Jesus come soon.*

*Take us home, Lord Jesus, your church upward bring/
Maranatha**, the word that our lips gladly sing.*

*For we long to assemble before our great King/ Come on down,
Lord Jesus, come soon.*

** Revelation 22:20*

*** O Lord, come! / 1 Corinthians 16:22*