

Teaching *from* Zion

"...for out of Zion shall come forth Torah
and the word of the Lord from
Jerusalem." — Isaiah 2:3



PLAGUES

*"I make peace, and create evil;
I am the LORD who does all
these things."*

Isaiah 45:7



Netivyah **נתיביה** Teaching from Zion

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About Netivyah

Netivyah in Hebrew means "the Way of the Lord." "The Way" was one of the names by which the early community of believers was known in the Brit Chadashah (New Testament). Paul says, "I worship the God of our fathers in accordance with the Way (which they call a sect). I continue to believe everything that accords with the Torah and everything written in the Prophets." (Acts 24:14 CJB). As followers of "the Way," we believe in the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We try to be faithful to God's law (the Torah) and to the rest of Scripture—the Prophets and the Writings. We believe that the Messiah promised in God's word is Yeshua (Jesus), the one who "saves His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

More Information: www.netivyah.org
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News from Netivyah

"Acharei Ha'Hagim," After the holidays!

In Israel, the school year starts September 1st, after a two-month summer vacation. Children are out of their routines, families travel abroad, summer camps of all sorts operate and in general, children spend much too long on screens and parents use all their work vacation days. By the time we finally go back to "normal" and children go back to school, the fall holidays happen: Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot!!! More vacation time, as soon as three weeks later, is spread out for nearly a month!!! Not only that, but these holidays which are wonderful and amazing periods of fellowship, bonding, praise, worship, and much more, require a lot of preparation and energy. This creates a situation where many things are delayed from September 1st until "Acharei Ha'Hagim," after the holidays. Things such as higher education (universities and colleges), after-school activities (soccer, swimming, ballet, and more), many bureaucratic and government actions also can only be done properly "after the holidays" since so many of them are closed during the holidays.

This year though, with the Covid19 Pandemic, the term "Acharei Ha'Chagim" is much less reliable, we do not know what this period will bring. Yes, some children may return to school, yes, some offices may open, yes, the higher education is supposed to start, but many are working from home, (and many are recently unemployed), many are studying via Zoom or other online platforms, or in small capsules at differing hours (some in the morning and others in the afternoon). During these unsteady times, it is all the more important that we lean on our eternal Father in heaven. He is our Rock and our Redeemer, and we have to rely on him during the storms that we face.

Here at Netivyah, we continue to distribute food to the poor and needy of Jerusalem. Throughout all the Covid restrictions and lockdowns, we have been able to operate as an essential service, thus continuing to help and bless our neighbors each and every single week without exception. Currently, we are helping over 170 families with a nutritious food package of fruit, vegetables, frozen goods, and dry goods.

As a result of the worldwide pandemic, we are unable to travel and gather together to hold conferences as we have done in the past in Brazil, Finland, the Netherlands, Japan, and so many other countries. It is hard to be separated from our brothers and sisters around the world during such trying times. Thankfully, human ingenuity has provided us with some means of compensation such as Facebook and Zoom. While not nearly as good as breaking bread with friends and family (and certainly with their own challenges and pitfalls), at least we are able to share some of what we do and believe. We have had the pleasure of conducting some online seminars with our Japanese, Brazilian, and Indian brothers and sisters. We have a Finnish one being planned currently, and all of these are in addition to the almost-daily broadcasts Joseph does via Facebook Live.

Youth activities have come to a full stop since our youth are spread throughout the city, each with his own routine (school, after school activities, friends). Should even one of them need to enter quarantine it would affect each of their respective circles and that is a situation we wish to avoid. We hope to start back as soon as restrictions lift with some outdoor gatherings.

As mentioned above, universities and colleges are slated to start and with them our scholarship program. This year, we have increased the number of students receiving our scholarships from 20 to 36! There were so many applications this year, a wonderful development in that the Messianic body in Israel is growing and putting down strong roots, but also a sign of the times with so many businesses closing, so many unemployed the need is greater than ever!

I want to thank you all personally for standing with Netivyah, for standing with Israel, without your support and prayers we could not continue to shine the light of Yeshua the Messiah here and around the world.

PLAGUES STRIKES SICKNESS & PANDEMIC IN THE WORD OF GOD

By Joseph Shulam

The Word of God is no stranger to plagues, pandemics, and general punishment by God against the rebellious nations, especially the God-chosen people, the people of Israel.

There are a few problems that I must bring to your attention, and one of these problems is the monochromatic translation of the Hebrew Bible into English and other European languages.

The Hebrew Bible has a limited vocabulary. The number of Hebrew words in the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible) is a total of around 22,000. However, there are at least four different Hebrew words that are translated with one English word, plague! I am listing examples below of the translation “plague” and the Hebrew word transliterated in English letters as well as the variant meaning into English. You will notice that I have

put the Hebrew word for plagues and its meaning in parentheses.

The first time that we meet the word “plague” in the Bible is in Genesis 12:17, right in the beginning of the story of Abraham and his family.

Gen. 12:17, But the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues (nega'im gedolim = נגעים גדולים = greatly struck, often meaning leprosy) because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

The case of Genesis 12 and the story that Abraham asked Sarah his wife to lie and tell Pharaoh that she is Abraham's sister is interesting. Abraham and Sarah are not punished for the lie that they told Pharaoh. Pharaoh and his house are threatened with a great sickness (plague). When Pharaoh realized that he had been deceived and returns Sarah back to

Abraham her husband, the plague on his house stops. This is an important pattern to follow through the whole Bible. The takeaway here is that God is the one that brings Plagues and stops them.

Exo. 9:14, ”for at this time I will send all My plagues (magefah = מַגֵּפָה) to your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth.”

You see here too that God is speaking through Moses and Aaron and announces to Pharaoh that this time “I”, God, will send all His plagues to Pharaoh's heart and on my servants in order to inform Pharaoh that He, God, is unique and that there is none like Him on the earth. The ten plagues on Egypt are a demonstration of God's power and control over the powers of nature.



The number of Hebrew words in the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible) is a total of around 22,000. However, there are at least four different Hebrew words that are translated with one English word, plague!

Exo. 11:1, And the LORD said to Moses, “I will bring one more plague (nega’ = נָגַע = be struck) on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out of here altogether.

Exo. 12:13, Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague (hanegef = הַנֶּגֶף = could mean virus. In Hebrew, a virus is a Nagif – the same root.) shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

Exo. 12:23, For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD

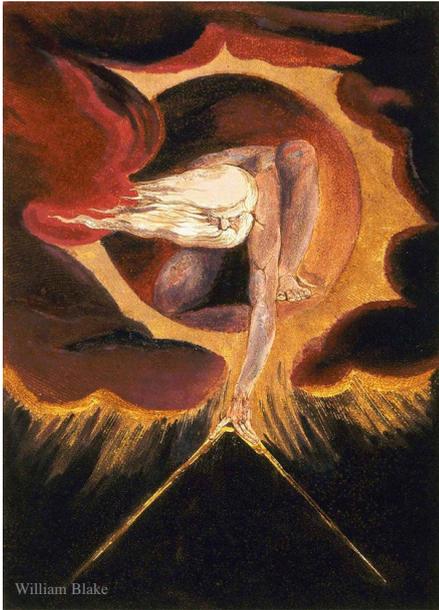
will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you (lingof = לִיגוֹף, this is the same root as negef, but in a different grammatical construction).

Lev. 26:21, “Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues (makkah = מַכָּה = “a blow, strike”) according to your sins.”

Num. 11:32-33, And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the

LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague (makkah rabbah me’od = מַכָּה רַבָּה מְאוֹד = a very big blow, strike).

Num. 16:46-48, Moses said to Aaron, “Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. The plague (hanegef = הַנֶּגֶף) has begun”. Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So, he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; so, the plague (hanegef = הַנֶּגֶף) was stopped.



The ten plagues on Egypt are a demonstration of God's power and control over the powers of nature.

Here, too, we see that the plague came from the Lord because of His wrath against those who have sinned. When Aaron made atonement for the sinners, the plague stopped.

Num. 25:8-9, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So, the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. And those who died in the plague (magefah = מַגֵּפָה) were twenty-four thousand.

Num. 31:16, Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel

of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague (magefah = מַגֵּפָה) among the congregation of the LORD.

Deut. 28:58, “If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, the LORD your God, then the LORD will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues (makkot = מַכּוֹת = hits, strikes) —great and prolonged plagues—and serious and prolonged sicknesses. Moreover, He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you. Also, every sickness and every plague (makkot = מַכּוֹת = hits, strikes), which is not written in this Book of the Law, will the LORD bring upon you until you are destroyed.”

1 Sam. 6:4, Then they said, “What is the trespass offering which we shall return to Him?” They answered, “Five golden tumors and five golden rats, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines. For the same plague (magefah = מַגֵּפָה) was on all of you and on your lords.”

2 Sam. 24:17, 21, 25, Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, “Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father’s house...Then Araunah said, “Why has my lord the king come to his servant?” And David said, “To buy the threshing floor from you, to build an altar to the LORD, that the plague may be withdrawn from the people...And David built there an altar to the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So, the LORD heeded the prayers for the land, and the plague (magefah = מַגֵּפָה) was withdrawn from Israel.” (1 Chronicles

21 is a parallel text to 2 Samuel 24 but with some important differences that I will touch on in a bit.)

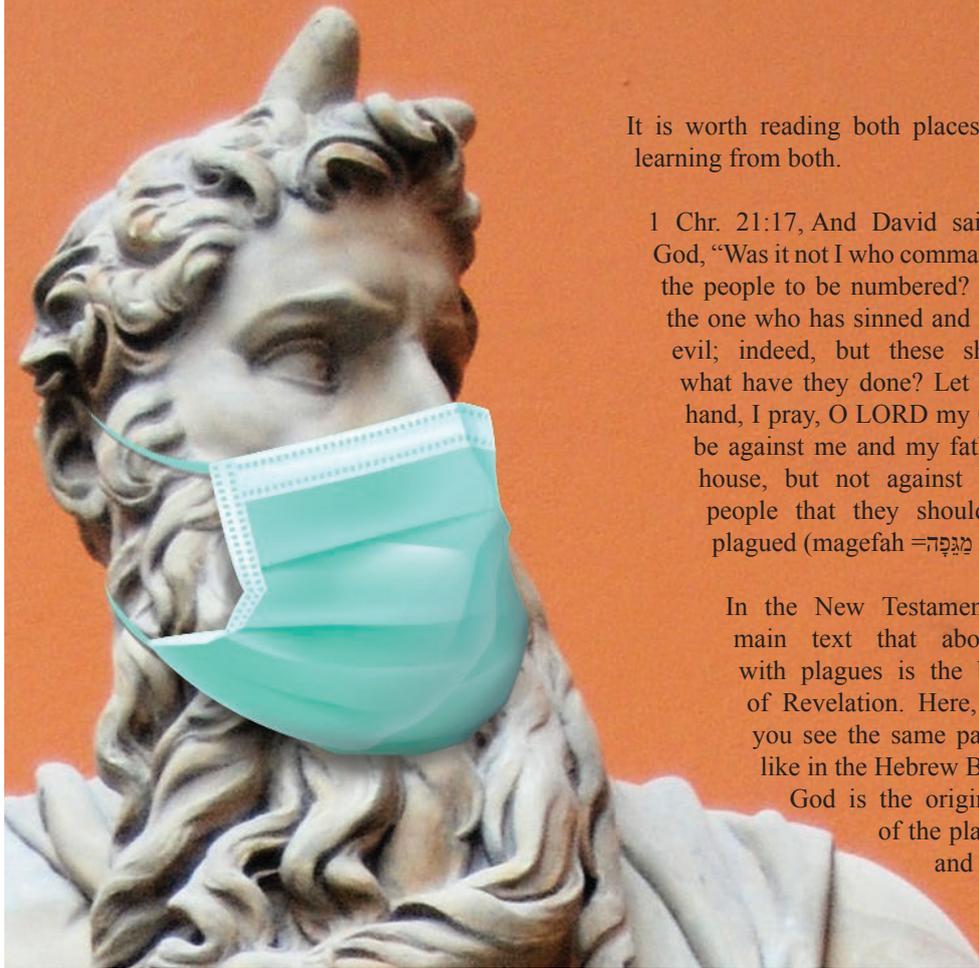
Psa. 91:10, No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague (Raa’ ve-Nega = רָעָה וְנִגַּע = evil and be struck, synonym to leprosy) come near your dwelling.

1 Kings 8:37-38, “When there is famine in the land, pestilence or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers; when their enemy besieges them in the land of their cities; whatever plague (nega’ = נֶגַע) or whatever sickness there is; whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone, or by all Your people Israel, when each one knows the plague (nega’ = נֶגַע) of his own heart, and spreads out his hands toward this temple:

Zech. 14:12, 15, 18, And this shall be the plague (magefah = מַגֵּפָה) with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, Their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, And their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths...Such also shall be the plague (magefah = מַגֵּפָה) on the horse and the mule, on the camel and the donkey, and on all the cattle that will be in those camps. So, shall this plague be...If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague (magefah = מַגֵּפָה) with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

Psa. 106:29-30, Thus they provoked Him to anger with their deeds, and the plague (magefah = מַגֵּפָה) broke out among them. Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stopped.

The Psalmist remembers the story from Numbers where the young man Phinehas took his spear and speared Cozbi and



It is worth reading both places and learning from both.

1 Chr. 21:17, And David said to God, “Was it not I who commanded the people to be numbered? I am the one who has sinned and done evil; indeed, but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, O LORD my God, be against me and my father’s house, but not against Your people that they should be plagued (magefah מַגֵּפָה).

In the New Testament the main text that abounds with plagues is the book of Revelation. Here, too, you see the same pattern like in the Hebrew Bible;

God is the originator of the plagues and He

plagues as harsh as they can be all originate from the hand of the Almighty God who uses these horrible means to warn, educate, punish, train and return His children back to the right path.

Please see the following examples from the book of Revelation and take into account that there is one God, Creator of heaven and Earth and that He loves His children so much that He sent His Son, Yeshua, to this world to atone for our sins. Throughout thousands of years of history, God tried every way to restore His children (the human race) to the paths of righteousness, but in the end there was no other choice than to send His Son so that no one will be damned and that everyone would have a chance to be saved.

Rev. 9:18, 20, By these three plagues, a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths...But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these

The originator of the plagues in every case is the LORD Himself and no one else. There is no dualism in the Bible, there is one God.

Zimri, the president of the tribe of Simeon, right by the entrance of the Tabernacle of the Lord.

1 Chronicles chapter 21 is a parallel chapter to 2 Samuel 24. It is an interesting story and there are a few small differences in this synoptic text. It is important for those who at times argue with people who oppose the Gospel and claim that the four Gospels are not the same. Here in these two parallel texts telling the same story you see some differences between the two that close the argument of the opposition.

struck the enemies of Israel at times. Also, when Israel sinned and rebelled, He is the one who struck Israel with plagues. When Israel repented, or Moses and Aaron interceded and atoned for the sins of Israel, the plagues stopped.

In the book of Revelation, we see the last chapters of Earth’s history plagued with one plague after another, until the very end. The plagues of the book of Revelation are terrible and harsh, and there are parallel texts of similar nature in rabbinical literature. The Revelation of John is still holding to the idea that

plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.

Rev. 11:6, These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.

Rev. 15:1, Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven

The fleas came to Europe and North Africa by ship across the Black Sea, carried on the bodies of plague-infected rats from the central Asian steppes.



angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.

Rev. 15:6, 8, And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands...The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

Rev. 16:9, 21, And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory...And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God

because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

Rev. 18:4, 8, And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues"... Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her.

Rev. 21:9, Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."

Rev. 22:18, For I testify to everyone who

hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book.

So, what are the main points of this article? In the dozens of cases of different types of plagues in the Bible, the originator of the plagues in every case is the LORD Himself and no one else. There is no dualism in the Bible, there is one God. He and only He can control both nature and pestilence or flood or plagues of every kind. He sends plagues as either a punishment or an educational instrument to guide the children of Israel to repentance and to the fear of the LORD, and In every case the plagues end with the repentance and return of the people to the LORD.

He is the One who was still in control during the medieval plagues. On

This plague was stopped by the young man Phinehas who took the law into his own hands and killed the two who were sinning a grave sin by the door of the Tabernacle in the wilderness.

He has prepared for us a place of eternity where there will be no tears or plagues, cancer or suffering.

August 24, 1349, 6,000 Jews died in the town of Mainz, Germany, after being accused of causing the plague known as the Black Death. The 14th century witnessed an infectious disease epidemic of apocalyptic proportions: bubonic, pneumonic, and septicemic plagues wiped out an estimated 20 million people — 30 to 35 percent of Europe's population — between 1347 and 1350. Over a three-month period in 1349, 800 people died every day in Paris, 500 a day in Pisa, and 600 a day in Vienna. The plague would rage in a region for three to six months, and then seemingly depart on a whim; it struck like a tornado, without rhyme or reason, wiping out whole families save for the youngest member or the oldest, for example; or killing everyone on one side of the street but leaving the other side untouched. People began looking for reasons and looked upon each other with fear and suspicion. The epidemic was blamed on a planetary alignment; an earthquake in Italy that had split the earth open, releasing noxious vapors; or the wrath of God. They also blamed the Jews, accusing them of poisoning the water and trying to destroy Christendom. Beginning in

1348, fueled by confessions that were obtained through torture, villagers began dragging Jews from their homes and throwing them on bonfires. The Jewish community in Mainz mounted a resistance in 1349, killing about 200 Christians and setting fire to their own homes rather than be subject to torture.

We now know that the plague was caused by a bacillus, *Yersinia pestis*, which was spread through flea bites. The fleas came to Europe and North Africa by ship across the Black Sea, carried on the bodies of plague-infected rats from the central Asian steppes. (Excerpt by Colonel Bryan Stewart).

No matter how terrible a plague is, God is in control. He used the bacteria to plague the world back then and He can use other means as well. But we must remember that He is in control and is sending the plague for a reason.

When the people understand the plagues and the reasons for these plagues and return to the LORD, the plagues end—sometimes even abruptly and immediately like in the case of the sins of Baal Peor in the wilderness. This plague was stopped by the young man Phinehas who took the law into his own hands and killed the two who were sinning a grave sin by the door of the Tabernacle in the wilderness.

In the case of the ten plagues (makkot) on Egypt, God wanted Pharaoh, all of Egypt and all the empires of the world for all history to know Him, His power and His control over the universe and the powers

of nature, both on Earth and in heaven.

This paper is belaboring the issue, but the reason that I included in it plenty of examples and texts from the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is to demonstrate that the same God, the same LORD, from Genesis to Revelation is using the very same M.O. in his dealing with humanity. With all the “harshness” of the LORD, His love for His creation and creatures was so great that He send Yeshua to be a sacrifice for our atonement. He has prepared for us a place of eternity where there will be no tears or plagues, cancer or suffering.

As for the coronavirus (Covid-19), do not forget that like with all the plagues in the Bible and in human history, the LORD is still in control, and it is probably the right thing that all of God's children ought to seek confession and repentance for our own sins and the sins of our nations.

It ought to be noted that there is no mention of Satan or anyone else responsible for the Biblical plagues except the LORD God of Israel who is LORD of lords and KING of kings.

Please read Isaiah 45:5-7: “I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create evil (ra' = עָרָא = calamity); I am the LORD, who does all these things.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joseph Shulam was born in Sofia, Bulgaria on March 24, 1946 to a Sephardic Jewish Family. In 1948, his family immigrated to Israel just before the establishment of the State. While in high school, he was introduced to the New Testament and immediately identified with the person of Yeshua. In 1981, Joseph and the small fellowship that was started in his house established one of the first official non-profit organizations of Jewish Disciples of Yeshua in Israel – Netivyah Bible Instruction Ministry. Joseph has lectured extensively and has assisted in encouraging disciples around the world. He and his wife Marcia have two children and two grandchildren.

COVID-19

An End of Days Plague?

By Rabbi Elliot Klayman

We are living in epic times. Aside from all the tsuris (worries) and challenges that are plaguing us in our day to day life, we are in a pandemic. As such, we are all in it together. Already, as of this writing, there are more than 23 million COVID-19 cases throughout the world, and more than 800,000 deaths according to World Health Organization (WHO) reporting.¹ And after a flattening of the curve, there is now an uptick in cases in both Israel and the United States, and many other countries, with no end in immediate sight. The virus causes chaos in homes and extended families and communities, with sickness ranging from asymptomatic to extremely ill;² quarantining; exposing others to the virus; death; taxing of human resources, hospital beds and equipment shortages; economic woes; and all of the mental and emotional distress that accompanies long periods of isolation, fear and uncertainty.

Sociologically, when a cohesive group faces an outside threat, the tendency is for the members of that group to come together in greater unity to combat the threat and to mend or overlook internal differences. Regarding COVID-19,

this may be true in some cases, but surprisingly, it is causing more division than unity in many circles. Many Christians and Messianic communities are experiencing a polarization that threatens to split local bodies, and sever long-term relationships, based upon entrenched positions related to the virus. They are split on every aspect of the virus. Did it come from a lab in China or from an animal butchery store? Are masks efficacious or not? Are people dying from the virus or from some co-morbid condition? Is it a hoax perpetrated by one political party or by the media, or is it real? Can children carry the virus or are they virtually immune? Should we defy government mandates and open the religious congregations, or should we comply and close them? The enemy takes delight in using crises, conflicts, and confusion to cause panic, divide the body of Messiah, and weaken the focus on Yeshua, in an attempt to wreak havoc, and ultimately mock God. But God is wiser than any virus, and He has a purpose. Is that purpose to bring us to our knees so that we “look up for [our] redemption draws near?”

1. These statistics are as of August 24, 2020.

2. Here is a representative report from Emily, a health care provider from Ohio who contracted COVID-19 while on the front lines at a hospital with coronavirus patients:

Listen, this isn't some hoax or some flu 2.0. This is...the worst I have ever felt in my entire life. It's not the breathing or the cough or the exhaustion...That is actually manageable. It's the pain. I have never hurt this badly in my entire life. Sometimes it's extreme body aches that literally feel like my skeleton is trying to exit my body (I am not exaggerating). Sometimes it's this sharp stabbing pain that feels like a million tiny knives every time I take a breath. And sometimes it's a burning pain. Burning in my chest, my lungs, even my legs. Sometimes it's all 3 types at once. Sometimes I get a headache and chills to go along with all of that. Today I actually felt a little bit better but tonight I feel so much worse. That's the thing about this garbage virus. Every moment is different. It feels like it is never going to end. This isn't a hoax and it isn't time to get lax with the recommendations. It only takes one person to infect hundreds...

Assuredly, a governor of a state may declare a health emergency if the situation warrants, and may restrict even the right to assemble in a building for the purpose of worship.

Zooming, live-streaming and YouTube are a few of the ways they are adjusting. Small home groups are meeting with masking, distancing, and hand washing requirements.

The Passover Plague

Just as in Egypt 3000 years ago, most of us, because of the modern COVID-19 plague, experienced sheltering-in-place.

Back in Egypt, it was a command from God with respect to the last plague — the death of the first born. Each Israelite family was to remain in their makom (place = home) under the protection of El Shaddai. In accord with the instruction, they were to place the blood of a lamb on the top and side posts of their doors. By that sign, the angel of death would know to pass over that house. All Israelites and some Egyptians, as well, chose to take up their lot with the God of Israel. Today, the command to stay in place or imposing other restrictions comes from governments. The state, in times like this, is a form of authority that we should submit to unless contrary to clear Biblical mandate. We have scriptures that so instruct:

“For the Lord’s sake, submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of

state, or the officials he has appointed.” (1 Peter 2:13-17)

“Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God.” (Romans 13:1-2)

“Remind the believers to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good. They must not slander anyone and must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone.” (Titus 3:1-2)

Like the Passover command, the restrictions from the governmental authorities are temporary, and certainly none compromises the believers’ Biblical principles. Scripture says to “fail not to assemble ourselves together.” Although commands that restrict “congregating” may be a sacrifice and even a hardship, it is temporary with a reasonable motive of saving innocent lives, which in Judaism is the highest priority. “He who saves a life is as if he saved the entire world” (Sanhedrin 4:5). In Jewish halakha

The virus is highly contagious, adding thousands of deaths per day to the tabulations worldwide; and about one new case in the U.S. every ninety seconds.

(law), it is even permitted to break the law, including the Sabbath, in order to save lives under the rabbinic principle of *pekuach nefesh* (literally, “opening up the soul”). Sheltering-in-place is something that history,³ medical science,⁴ and common sense inform us relieves suffering and saves lives by inhibiting the spread of the virus. Additionally, face masking is a proven technique, supported by scholarly journal research,⁵ to restrict the virus’ projectiles on one end and its intake on the other. Social distancing is also an obvious deterrent to the spread by putting a person beyond the reach of the droplets containing the virus. These are sacrifices that demonstrate our love for our fellow neighbor by joining together to contain the virus. We now know that even the asymptomatic can transmit the virus. “Greater love has no person but he lay down his life for a friend” (John 15:13).

Furthermore, a government mask mandate, social distancing, or the prohibition of congregating on-site are not necessarily a violation of the “free exercise” of religion clause that exists in most democratic states including the U.S. and Israel. Each state has the constitutional or parliamentary authority and responsibility to regulate the “health, safety and general welfare” of people within its jurisdiction, often referred to as the “police power.” No constitutional right contained in the U.S. Bill of Rights is absolute. The United States Supreme

Court has ruled on the right to bear arms, the right to free speech, to assemble, and the right to practice one’s religion. In each case the court has carved out exceptions. Assuredly, a governor of a state may declare a health emergency if the situation warrants, and may restrict even the right to assemble in a building for the purpose of worship, if reasonably necessary to contain an out of control contagious virus and thereby protect the health, safety, and welfare of its inhabitants. Any mandate must be reasonably related to the objective sought, the state must have a rational basis (or a compelling state interest, depending on the factual basis) to impose the restriction, and the regulation must be narrowed to the least drastic measures necessary to accomplish the goals.

Obviously, the *kehilah* (congregation) is not the building but rather the congregants. Congregations are finding innovative ways to meet safely and satisfy all government requirements without totally giving up the freedom of its constituents to practice their faith. Zooming, live-streaming and YouTube are a few of the ways they are adjusting. Small home groups meeting with masking, distancing, and hand washing requirements are also an option in some states and localities. Outside meetings with the standard precautions are still another solution to the wider spread of the virus, especially in poorly ventilated buildings.

The virus is highly contagious, adding thousands of deaths per day to the tabulations worldwide; and about one new case in the U.S. every ninety seconds. It can be contracted by viral droplets that travel through the air when a person coughs, sneezes or merely talks, or when viral droplets are propelled by air flow or wind. It is highly deadly, much more than the common annual flu.⁶

This opportunistic virus targets the weaknesses in society. Those who have compromised immunological systems due to chemotherapy and immunosuppressant drugs, or those with underlying serious medical conditions, as diabetes, heart disease and other major organ diseases are “open season” for the virus. Certain people are at higher risk because they tend to live in more densely crowded urban spaces, lack access to health care over the years, or present underlying comorbidities. The homeless are particularly vulnerable. Even our food supply chain is under threat of shortages because of how the virus has infected food processors and handlers. It takes down the strongest economies in the world, reducing them to massive unemployment, giant decreases in profits in vulnerable industries and companies, even forcing otherwise well-funded businesses into bankruptcy, resulting in a serious diminution of a country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

COVID-19 attacks our nursing homes

3. Nina Storchlic & Riley D. Champine, “How some cities ‘flattened the curve’ during the 1918 flu pandemic.” National Geographic, March 27, 2020, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/2020/03/how-cities-flattened-curve-1918-spanish-flu-pandemic-coronavirus/> (accessed August 11, 2020).

4. Evan Webeck, “Coronavirus: Could Bay Area’s early shelter-in-place order have saved thousands of lives?” East Bay Times, May 21, 2020, <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2020/05/21/coronavirus-could-bay-areas-early-shelter-in-place-order-have-saved-thousands-of-lives/> (accessed August 11, 2020); Edward Lempinen, “Emergency COVID-19 measures prevented more than 500 million infections, study finds.” Berkeley News, June 8, 2020, <https://news.berkeley.edu/2020/06/08/emergency-covid-19-measures-prevented-more-than-500-million-infections-study-finds/> (accessed August 11, 2020).

5. See e.g., Wei Lyu & George Wehby, “Community Use of Face Masks and COVID-19: Evidence from a Natural Experiment of State Mandates in the US.” Health Affairs, Vol. 39, no 8, June 16, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2020.00818> (last accessed August 11, 2020).

6. Randell Wexler, “How COVID-19 is different and worse than the flu.” The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, April 15, 2020, <https://wexnermedical.osu.edu/blog/how-covid-19-is-different-and-worse-than-the-flu> (last accessed August 11, 2020); Brian Resnick and Christina Animashaun, “Why Covid-19 is worse than the flu, in one chart.” Vox, Mar 18, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2020/3/18/21184992/coronavirus-covid-19-flu-comparison-chart> (last accessed August 11, 2020); Shawn Radcliffe, “Here’s Why COVID-19 Is Much Worse than the Flu.” Healthline, May 14, 2020, <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/why-covid-19-isnt-the-flu> (last accessed August 11, 2020).

This COVID-19 plague may have occurred because of misuse of animals. It may not, however, be a direct global judgment.

where the sick feeble are highly susceptible, pointing out a general neglect of the elderly in private nursing facilities, ineffective state and federal regulations and ineffectiveness of state and federal agency regulators. It attacks our military, including our ships of naval soldiers, where so many have contracted the virus, making countries more vulnerable to outside threats of war, or a surprise attack, all necessitating a re-evaluation of our security during pandemics. Neither are prisons exempt. In these crowded closed quarters, the virus spreads quickly from inmate to inmate. Many are in jail awaiting trial, and cannot afford to post bond. What may be a petty offense (if one at all) may turn out to be a "death sentence." This points us to the need of prison reform. Isolation for prisoners is worse now because their contact with family and friends are limited or non-existent. "When I was in prison you did not visit me." (Matt 25:43)

When the virus has completed its dastardly course, governments throughout the world will need to re-assess and buttress the weak areas that the virus targeted in its destructive path. But is this a biblical plague from God pouring out a global judgment?

Non-Biblical Plagues

Plagues enumerated in the Book of Exodus, in connection with the first Passover, were directed at the "helpless" Egyptian gods with God casting judgment on the Pharaoh for his failure to heed Moses' cries of "Let my people go," which originated from the heart of God. This COVID-19 plague may have

occurred because of misuse of animals. It may not, however, be a direct global judgment. Some plagues happen because we are in the throes of original sin in the Garden, which resulted in the fall of Adam and Eve, and all creation. Plagues, disease, war, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and extreme weather entered the planet, and we all suffer because of them.

The Plague of Justinian, 541-542 AD, which was caused by infected rats that fed on the storehouses of grain, was a precursor of the Black Plague. It was by far the deadliest recorded plague as of that date, taking an estimated 25-100 million lives during two centuries of recurrence and killing one-third to one-half of Europe's inhabitants. The Black Plague in Europe that killed as many as 100 million people in Eurasia in 1347-51 AD was probably also due to rats infecting fleas which bit humans. These plagues were not impressed with a clear biblical footprint of targeted judgment.

The Spanish flu that riddled this world in 1918-1920 took a devastating toll when one-third of the 1.5 billion people on the planet contracted it; it killed 50-100 million people or more, worldwide, including 675,000 in the United States alone. At that time we did know that social distancing, public closures and masking were ways to contain it.⁷ The spread of this 1918 pandemic proliferated in part because of a refusal of too many to abide by the sheltering-in-place, masking, business closures, refraining from crowd gatherings, and distance pleas and ordinances. It steamrolled completely out of control. A second wave of the virus caught the

masses unaware and resulted in the bulk of the fatalities. We have learned from that catastrophe by examining what worked and what did not work in 1918-20, and the epidemiologists and medical community have based some of their knowledge, recommendations,

Like COVID-19, the Spanish flu is not one that we can, for sure, label a judgment from God, apart from the fall in the Garden.

and responses to this current plague to slow and ultimately arrest the plague. The Spanish flu contagion was much more infectious, resulting in many more contractions and deaths than the current virus to date, which has only been on its deadly course for seven months. Although the "jury" is still out on COVID-19, we will hopefully be ready with a preventative and a cure if and when it comes around again which it is projected to do. Like COVID-19, the Spanish flu is not one that we can, for sure, label a judgment from God, apart from the fall in the Garden. That does not minimize the need to "fight" these types of viruses with all the knowledge

7. Nina Strochlic & Riley D. Champine, "How some cities 'flattened the curve' during the 1918 flu pandemic." National Geographic, March 27, 2020, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/2020/03/how-cities-flattened-curve-1918-spanish-flu-pandemic-coronavirus/> (last accessed August 11, 2020); Loyola University Health System, "Lessons from the Spanish flu: Early restrictions lowered disease, mortality rates." Science Daily, March 30, 2020, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/03/200330110344.htm> (last accessed August 11, 2020); Becky Little, "When Mask-Wearing Rules in the 1918 Pandemic Faced Resistance." History, May 6, 2020, <https://www.history.com/news/1918-spanish-flu-mask-wearing-resistance> (last accessed August 11, 2020).

Plagues are mentioned throughout the Hebrew Bible, associated with judgment from God, including the plague of fire and brimstone that fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah.

we have compiled to date through experience and associated research, with the remedies we have amassed in our studies, and with prayer.

Biblical Judgments

The Ten Plagues that poured out judgment on Egypt were not the only Biblical plagues. Plagues are mentioned throughout the Hebrew Bible, associated with judgment from God, including the plague of fire and brimstone that fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah recorded in Genesis 19:24. Plagues were responsible for the death of hordes of Israelites during rebellions such as when the ten Israelites in the book of Numbers who spied out the land and delivered a bad report were struck by plague (Num. 14:36-37). The sin of Korah's invasion into the priesthood of Aaron resulted in 250 Israelites who followed and suffered judgment at the hands of the Lord, burned up by fire. Then a host of Israelites murmured and complained about Moses' and Aaron's treatment of Korah and company, and those 14,000 were subjected to a deathly plague before it was stayed (Numbers 16).

In II Samuel 24, it is recorded that a plague killed 70,000 Israelites apparently because of the sin of David in numbering the people. Even David inquired as to why these innocent people were required to suffer for his sin. The reason for God's mandated census was in order to expiate the sins of each person (even before they sinned) who paid the one-half shekel tax pursuant to the census, as explained in Exodus 30. Also, those under 20 of age were not to be counted. Perhaps David did not apply the correct procedure to

the census. In any event he was afforded three options for punishment: three years of famine, three months of war or three days of pestilence. Apparently, he chose pestilence (II Sam 24:11-15). Perhaps David had the wrong motive. Perhaps it was not a God-mandated census. No other census conducted by David was God-mandated, and yet there were no ensuing punishments. We do not have the answer except that the plague stopped when David made repentance and offerings.

There are biblical plagues on the horizon that have not yet occurred but are prophesied. In Zech. 14:12, we read of one such plague: "This will be the plague with which the Lord will strike all persons who wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths."

This does not sound like the viral variety but rather a nuclear holocaust type when Yeshua returns and battles the nations who come up against Jerusalem. That is a sure marking of the "day of the Lord" when Yeshua returns to establish his kingdom reign on earth.

Is This the End of Days?

COVID-19 is certainly the continuation of the birth pangs preceding the day of the Lord, or the Great Tribulation. But it is not the absolute sign of the end times that are marked in scripture. "For nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the

beginning of sorrows" (Matt 24:7-8). Together these signs must coalesce with intensity, but even then it is not the end, but rather the beginning of labor pains. There will be terrifying signs in heaven, like the moon turning blood red and the sun black (Luke 21:11), yet even those are not the ultimate sign of the Lord's return.

Another sign, which we have as of yet not seen, is the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place, as prophesied by Daniel. This is the anti-christ! To date there is no temple for him to occupy. In Daniel 9:27, this anti-christ signs a peace covenant with Israel, and that of course has not happened. "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor shall ever be" (Matt 24:21). Though this is a sign of the end time, when it occurs, it is not the mark of the impending day of the Lord when Yeshua returns.

Though we are experiencing tribulation pangs, it is not yet the Great Tribulation that has come upon us, nor is it a definitive marker of the return of the Messiah. However, "[s]eeing all these things shall be dissolved what manner of persons ought [we] to be in all holy conversation and good news" (2 Pet 3:10), knowing that "[i]n the world you shall have tribulation"? But Yeshua said, "Be of good cheer I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Thus, we occupy until His return, awaiting with great anticipation that day when "His feet shall stand upon the Mount of Olives" (Zech. 14:4), and there will be a "great fountain open for sin and uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1).

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**Conclusion:
How Shall We Then Live?**

Distress often brings out the worst in us. Closed-in quarters with the pressures of a lack of income tend to put us in a high stress mode, and further restrictions on our fellowship interactions and freedom to travel exacerbate an already frustrating situation. The Psalms of Ascent (120-134) are particularly

instructive. Psalm 120 speaks of three stressors — defamation, disconnection, and discord — all of which are certainly present among many who struggle with the changes in their lives and in societal structure. The yetzer hora, the evil inclination, that abides in us all can tend to erupt, and start engaging in blame-shifting. “Who did this to me?” leads to a plethora of possibilities, and different theories gain traction. Like-minded theorists band together to form a critical mass of blamers, slanderers, and pandemic deniers which devolves into “end time” rhetoric, wild claims, “fake news” allegations, and conspiracy theories about the origin, spread, and actors in this pandemic drama.

Extreme conspiracy theories take hold and become rampant throughout social media and are often used to justify and identify with a political position. Instead of occupying in unity and focusing on the first words in Psalm 120, “to the Lord,” we look to other places for solace and solution. Instead of “occupying about our Father’s business” as Yeshua said and did, we tend to lower our gaze from the heavenly to the earthly and obsess on the political realm. None of this is edifying. One hundred and fifty-five years ago as the Civil War was essentially won by the north and the troops were coming home, Abraham Lincoln in his second inaugural address said:

“With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God

gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.”

By analogy, we are in a war against COVID-19 which has already caused America more deaths than the Korean conflict, the Vietnam War, and every American encounter in the Middle East since.⁸ The focus should be on healing, not on who did this to me. It should be on unity and on “us” as opposed to divisiveness and “me.” Our thrust should be on “How might we join together to help each other resolve the problems that attend to this virus?” Blaming the government, political parties, individuals, or some diabolical plot only intensifies the problem and de-spiritualizes us, such that we are in the weakened condition where the enemy wants us to be. In fact, first the blame is here and then it is there, and, especially when it comes to plagues, it is not uncommon to blame the Jews. This happened during the Black plague. Let us not fall into that unseemly accusative activity, but through this pandemic let us yield to our “better angels” and demonstrate our faith and confidence in God by taking this opportunity to share the love of God with the needy, the marginalized and with those who are suffering without hope.

8. As of August 24, 2020, according to Johns Hopkins University and Medicine, there have been almost 177,000 confirmed COVID-19 deaths in the U.S., as compared to approximately 106,600 U.S. combined deaths in the Korean Conflict (about 39,000); Vietnam (about 58,000); and the various conflicts since in the Middle East (about 9600).

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PANDEMIC ON RETAINER

By Jared Seltzer

The wise king Solomon taught that the first person to state his case seems right until his fellow comes and cross-examines him (Prov. 18:17). Frankly, since the COVID-19 virus outbreak gripped the world's attention, that proverbial other "fellow" has been grossly underreported. Nearly every one of our information sources bombards us with basically the same repeated message that could be stated as,

"We, the human race, are suffering a global pandemic that is infecting millions of people and leaving hundreds of thousands dead, and we should expect recurrence in second or third waves. The only way to survive it is to comply with certain mandates said to slow or stop the spread, or else we will face fines, arrest, or legal prosecution."

What a terrifying thesis! Who can or would dare to argue against it? Foolish or fearless, in comes our proverbial "fellow" to cross-examine it.

One fancy term that you might have noticed popping up in resistance to governmental response to this contagion is the word "Orwellian." While many writers simply mean to say "tyrannical," the nuance of this descriptor highlights the scrupulous utilization of words with the intent to hijack even a person's private thoughts and convictions. In an oversimplified sense, it calls good evil and evil good so as to solicit specific thoughts and behavior from the general population that ultimately destroy a free society; and the person targeted is you. Beware of this tactic lest you fall prey to it.

If you are the kind of person who does not mind being deceived and controlled, then feel free to flip on to another article; but for anyone claiming to be level-headed and responsible, take a moment to evaluate what is really being said in this often-repeated mantra. At its core, the above-stated narrative thrives on fear—not only on the fear of dying, but also on the fear of legal action, arrest, and jail time—to pressure good and innocent people into compliance with whatever escapes our governors' lips. The diabolical perfection of this narrative is that anyone who dares dissent is ostracized and branded a "bad person" who clearly must not care about loss of life. As it were, if someone does not comply, then it necessarily follows that he neither cares about the actual suffering of sick people nor does he care that his shameless inaction could infect and possibly kill others.

This knee-jerk reaction effectively adds third and fourth fronts of fear into the equation: the fear of rejection, a much more grievous anguish than most are willing to admit, and the fear of causing suffering or death to others, something that any moral person would try to prevent. In short, the four-faceted fearmongering argument boils down to this. Which do you find scariest: a prolonged agonizing death, causing death to someone else by your inaction, a guilty verdict against you in court plus associated fines and jailtime, or being utterly shunned by your peers, beloved family and friends? If any or all of these apply, then you will quite naturally take the path of conformity to the stated demands of the day which would, in

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any other context, glow of oppressive terrorism (literally, control by fear).

There is a labyrinth of related issues naturally stemming from this pandemic that all deserve critical attention. For example, exactly how accurate or significant are the reported case and death counts? How effective are the measures implemented to quell the spread? What is an acceptable degree to which the people and the economy should suffer under government mandates? Can government restrict individual rights endowed by our Creator because of a crisis? What does a balanced risk assessment of the crisis look like? And why is there a simultaneous rise in advancing agendas that disturb societal peace?

Unfortunately, any one of these issues creates significant division among the people because of the “cognitive dissonance” (concurrently espousing conflicting values) that looming fear breeds. Alas, we are being hit with an onslaught of divisive issues, and each of us cares more about maintaining relative comfort or being viewed as being on the right side than about seeking to

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We are being hit with an onslaught of divisive issues, and each of us cares more about maintaining relative comfort or being viewed as being on the right side than about seeking to understand both sides.

understand both sides of the issue and addressing inaccuracies. The deceptive use of language that this crisis has mustered has resulted in sweepingly successful compliance as well as the squelching of almost all dissenters. It is truly Orwellian.

So how accurate or significant are the reported case and death counts, anyway? Indubitably, statistics is the one field of math that most readily permits misrepresentation of truth; otherwise known as lying. Depending on how survey questions are worded, sample groups are selected and tested, and how responses are represented, the results could apparently or even literally oppose truth diametrically. So which organization’s statistics should be touted as “factual”?

The official organizations that are charged with keeping track of the numbers (such as worldometer.info and the American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC) put worldwide confirmed cases at over 24 million and climbing (for perspective, that is about 0.3% of the world population that is tested and thought to have contracted COVID), and 99% of these are candidly listed as “mild condition.” But this number does not consider most or all asymptomatic infected people for whom estimates rise to around 40% of the population. Translation: there is a pretty good chance that an arbitrary person may have already had COVID-19 and did not even realize it, and even if not,

there is an overwhelming likelihood that there will be mild symptoms if any at all.

Further, these organizations do not factor in possibly disingenuous counting methods or misdiagnoses. In fact, many doctors (in America at least) are being pressed by health authorities to put COVID-19 on death certificates even on a mere suspicion only. People dying of heart problems or pneumonia were tagged as COVID deaths; even people who died of physical trauma have fallen under the COVID-19 tally simply because they had contracted it before they died. If someone died of a gunshot wound or motorcycle accident but had COVID, then they are lumped into the COVID category. Incidentally, hospitals receive extra funding from Medicare for each COVID patient (\$13,000), and if that patient goes on a ventilator then they receive even more (\$39,000). How genuine then is the true number? If reevaluated fatality numbers from Italy are applied to other countries’ numbers, then the true count may be inaccurate by around 22%. But even beyond that, testing accuracy itself is another important consideration. While the less used and more time-consuming PCR test returns only 1% of false positives and up to 10% of false negatives, the “rapid test” returns 15%-20% false negatives. While tests for other diseases do have the same problem, this still further skews the estimated number of authentic positive cases.

Further, actual frontline medical

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experts are going public to admit how their supervisors and oversight boards have been pushing less effective treatments and, in some cases, forbidding tried treatment regimens (like hydroxychloroquine, HCQ, a drug statistically safer than aspirin, or high doses of vitamin C among other nutrients) with which doctors had already observed success among their own patients. In the interest of intellectual honesty or even concern, doctors have taken to journals or the internet to educate others about this virus and effective treatments in their professional experience, but astonishingly, some of these doctors are being reprimanded, investigated, or even fired. For example, a board-certified emergency physician, Dr. Simone Gold, was fired simply for “appearing in an embarrassing video” wherein she held a summit discussion about COVID treatment options. Why are highly educated medical professionals who are the ones interacting with the sick coming under pressure for discussing their professional experience? Why are common and effective substances disparaged while expensive ones and an eventual (and likely rushed) vaccine are hailed?

Let us ignore for argument’s sake that the numbers may be rather inaccurate. According to those same numbers, of the people who actually are in serious condition because of the virus, further

details of their frailty and overall health shed incredible light. The age of a person has a predictable correlation to their chances of suffering or dying from the virus. The younger people (18-39) make up only 0.19% of all COVID deaths, 40-49-year-olds comprise 0.98%, 3.2% of them are 50-59, 7.88% are 60-69, and 19.96% are 70-79. Children under 18, with extremely rare exception, are resilient to it, infrequently ever exhibiting symptoms, while the lion’s share of deaths, 67.68%, are people already over 80 years of age. But then, average life expectancy is only 73.2 years of life. Sure, the death of a person, no matter his age is sobering, but experience tells us that there is a strong and universal correlation between age and time of death without the variable of Coronavirus entering the picture at all.

Furthermore, the number of comorbidities that a person suffers from has a strong correlation to his chances of dying from the virus. About 0.2% of COVID deaths had no reported preexisting conditions at all. The takeaway then is that, considering COVID-19 or not, younger or healthier people will be more likely to live, and older or unhealthier people will be more likely to suffer or die. But we already knew that in the absence of COVID; it is just highlighting it.

When the truth of the dubious details of the fatality rates eventually surfaced, we heard more about “new cases” instead. (Were the reported fatalities no longer scary enough?) Each day or week we read or hear of hundreds or thousands of “new cases,” but there is great deception in using this term. A new case is when someone takes a test (voluntarily or obligatorily) and thereby discovers that he is or was infected (depending on the testing type). But if about 40% of any population has already contracted the virus and 99% of cases present mild or

no symptoms, then discovering that those people were infected does not change reality; it merely becomes known. Claiming that new cases equals more warranted fear is a complete fabrication.

As for fatalities, no righteous person can bear the death of an innocent person. But we all make calculated risks every single day. The leading causes of death (according to the CDC in 2017 America whose population was 325+ million) are chronic disease, accidents, and suicides, annually totaling over two million people (or approximately 0.64% of the population). For perspective, this number is almost 12 times the (probably already inflated) total COVID-19 casualties. But honestly, which government is outlawing unhealthy foods that cause heart disease, use of toxic chemicals that contribute to cancer, or motor vehicles that create risk of fatal accidents? We take risks every day that jeopardize our welfare many times more than that posed by COVID, yet we do not fear them. So, there is a marked double standard with this COVID crisis. Critical thinkers will ask, why? Are hysterical reactions to COVID planned?

Next, let us have a look at the promoted methods of mitigating the virus’ spread, namely, social distancing and facemasks. For toxins that are more easily detectable, such as smelly harsh cleaning

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agents and visible airborne debris, we naturally try to distance ourselves from its reach, and if we cannot, then we wear protective gear to minimize contact with the agitating matter. Now, COVID-19 is not as easily detectable, but its presence is published enough in the media, so why then must governments insist on mandating those same practices under the threat of legal proceedings? Additionally, masks, with rare exception are wholly incapable of filtering out such small particles as viruses and bacteria. COVID-19 particles vary in size but are roughly 0.125-0.2 microns in diameter. But even high quality N95 masks, if properly fitted, advertise filtering capabilities (at 95%) of 0.3-micron particles—particles much larger than the virus. The packaging of these masks will sometimes even include the disclaimer that it “will not provide any protection against COVID-19 (Corona virus) or other viruses or contaminants.” Plenty of doctors, if you would care to hear it, plainly state that masks are useless against COVID. So why the push for them?

Some promoters of face masks turn to science to justify their conviction. But scientific research on the matter is typically inconclusive or statistically insignificant, and for predictable reasons. The efficacy of the mask aside,

did the participants wear the mask 100% of the time or did they ever really come into contact with the virus? If you eat or smoke without a mask, or sleep or shower without one, or if you do not meet with infected individuals, then it reduces the certainty of the research results. This was a problem during (pre-COVID) influenza trials in the past; how much more for this novel coronavirus? One meta-research initiative looking at 14 studies says masks have a measured benefit, but another meta-research project looking at 17 studies says there is no statistically significant benefit. So, science, although a cherished pillar of certainty in modern times, is wholly unclear on the issue because of the testers’ and/or participants’ practices or surroundings during the study; there are simply too many unknowable variables.

But is there detriment to a person wearing a mask regardless of its actual efficacy? Well, an honest assessment of wearing a mask versus not wearing one immediately admits to heightened effort to breathe (resulting in lowered oxygen intake and greater carbon-dioxide recirculation) as well as oral bacteria toxicity buildup that increases stress to the immune system. Typical of any oxygen depriving practice, such conditions crystalize as headaches, dizziness, fatigue, and compromised mental acuity. This is hardly news. But if a person does his own research and feels confident that doing so lowers risk to himself or others, then what is stopping him? That is where the issue turns to division. In an effort to justify his position, mask-wearers and “anti-maskers” alike create destructive division among the people, accomplishing themselves what evil desires. Paul would tell us not to cast judgment on each other! Why should free-thinking and well-studied people be coerced into an opposing line of thought? More importantly, why should government leap to such an unbalanced

stance based on such limited scientific certainty? Is there some undeclared motive?

Keeping distance from the sick is a practice much older than COVID. Think of the last flu season. If someone has the sniffles, other people are less likely to come into very close contact with him and prefer rather to maintain distance to avoid potentially spreading sickness, especially if they have a weak immune system. Again, this is nothing new. Virtually everyone is now aware of COVID by now, so why must social distancing be legally enforced? Are people suddenly unable to calculate risks for themselves? If mandates are for alleged “protection of the wellness of the people,” does that not insinuate that the government purports to know better what is good for the individual than the individual does? Why not collect statistics, publish them publicly, and let individuals and communities decide what the best course of action is, as is the case with practically any other issue of concern?

Plenty of doctors, if you would care to hear it, plainly state that masks are useless against COVID. So why the push for them?

So, essentially the dilemma became “risk your life to COVID or lose your livelihood by government mandate.”

lockdowns have been hitting people and businesses very hard. In an effort to stay the numbers, most countries and American states have pushed for some kind of a lockdown. The idea is simple; if people are not interacting as much, then the virus will spread more slowly and will not overburden medical facilities, dubbed “flattening the curve.” Well, to be brutally honest, all too many medical facilities in America had already been struggling prior to COVID because of how poorly they have been operating for years; that is neither the fault of the sick nor should they be punished for it. Regardless of the intent of lockdowns, though, economic shutdowns did not truly prevent people from interacting; it just modified with whom they came into contact.

For evidence of this, look to the places that did not shut down the economy—a handful of example districts that supply a “control” to this colossal, live experiment. According to [statista.com](https://www.statista.com), the per-capita death rates in Sweden and Brazil (which did not implement mandatory lockdowns) are the sixth and eighth highest, respectively, while Belgium and Peru topped the list and the USA came in ninth, just higher than Mexico. Besides these nations, there are seven American states that did not impose lockdowns (of which only one, South Dakota, did not even close

schools). However astonishing, the case and fatality numbers from these states are also not topping the charts but are evenly scattered throughout the list of other states.

Alternatively, one could look to the rise and fall of similar diseases in years past in the absence of lockdowns. Among others, the CDC director, Robert Redfield, and the director of the US National Institute of Health, Anthony Fauci, have compared COVID to influenza. But the graphs of the spread of the annual flu (in the absence of lockdowns) are rather comparable to the rise and fall of COVID (with and without lockdowns); the curve was not “flattened.” The conclusion is simple: lockdowns did not slow the spread; they only hurt economies.

How did lockdowns hurt economies? In an unprecedented fashion, unemployment shot up, markets tumbled, many businesses were forced to close (many permanently), and supply chains lapsed. Again, the life of any one individual is admittedly precious, but by trying to prevent already statistically improbable death to the masses, the lockdowns effectively stole the livelihood and investment savings from those people whom it was purporting to protect. Free countries, especially the United States, originally instituted government solely to protect the God-given rights of the people who are the source of its power. But in an alleged effort to protect the welfare of the public, should government be allowed to restrict personal rights such as gathering peacefully, practicing free speech and religion, or not being forced to buy or use some arbitrary product (like masks)?

Well, that depends on if you fear your government more than your government fears you. In a 1997 US Supreme Court ruling (*Mack and Printz*

From a purely logical standpoint, any conspiracy theory is not deemed false simply because of its being a conspiracy theory.



v. United States), the court declared that the “hysteria of the day” does not negate constitutionally protected rights. Sure, one might argue that in very rare exceptions, local authorities should be able to implement temporary measures (that reflect popular sentiment and infringe minimally on personal rights) to regain rule of law or avoid widescale casualties, but these ought to be limited to a very short term and scope as the need demands. Government reaction to COVID, on the other hand, could hardly be described as balanced or minimal in duration or scope; it was overtly broad, universal, and unbound by clear time limits. It locked people in their homes, robbed them of their livelihood, lowered the value of their investments, severed supply chains for desired and needed

goods, and drove suicide, abuse, and domestic violence cases off the charts. So, essentially the dilemma became “risk your life to COVID or lose your livelihood by government mandate.” Is government too myopic to have foreseen this, or is there a more ominous explanation? What was the purpose of economic shutdowns?

This is where people tend to either jump to conspiracy theories or chock the question up to a senseless blame game. Well, halting imminent threat is never a fruitless blame game; when anyone has a quantifiable grievance in any other aspect of life, does he avoid it as frivolous, or does he discover its root and prevent its recurrence? Of course, he would prohibit it; that is the point! So, should people identify the source of and prevent further detrimental mandates? As to wild theories, scarcely would a person seriously suggest that corruption and conspiracies do not exist in even the private sector (but rather that their magnitude is typically proportional to the size of the organization); so should anyone assume that government, usually a nation’s largest organization, is

“Fear is a great way to control people... People’s ability to think for themselves is paralyzed if they’re frightened enough.”

somehow immune to them?

From a purely logical standpoint, any conspiracy theory is not deemed false simply because of its being a conspiracy theory (in fact, true conspiracies start as theories), but certainly every serious theory should be well-evidenced. Therefore, the question naturally arises: have governments historically dealt corruptly towards their governed? Try asking the Chinese or Russians; learn from history or be doomed to repeat it. During the twentieth century alone, governments around the world had killed over 250 million of their own people, much more than all wars and deadly conflicts accrued. This is to say nothing of the exorbitant and ludicrous taxes it demands from and freedom-defying legislation that it enforces upon the governed.

Understandably, a balanced assessment of the risks that COVID presents should have focused on the people who have the highest probability of suffering from it. Any blanket approach was simply irresponsible by arguably any metric. The elderly and ill are at highest risk, so measures to stay the disease should have been focused on protecting them, even if by persuasion and not government edict. But who took that balanced plan of action? Not many. So, has there been actual governmental foul play in the handling of COVID? No prudent person should ignore the possibility. After all, balanced coverage of COVID in the media is all but absent even though the mainstream statistics, when actually processed and evaluated, undermine its own severity.

So, what is the reason for biased news coverage and inflated numbers concerning COVID? In the words of a concerned medical doctor and Minnesota state senator, Scott Jensen plainly stated in an interview, “Fear is a great way to

Make no mistake, the COVID virus is real, and people are contracting it, but the world’s overreaction to it is nothing short of self-propagated fearmongering.

control people... People’s ability to think for themselves is paralyzed if they’re frightened enough.” Unsurprisingly, this highly respected doctor, who even earned the award of family practitioner of his entire state, has already received unjustified pushback. Because of an anonymous complaint, he is now under investigation for “spreading misinformation.” An educated, meticulous, and innocent man is under investigation for the contrived offense of sharing his professional experience. This is another fear tactic, and fear cripples. Just look at the story of the two spies whom Joshua sent to Jericho or the two enemy soldiers recounting a dream of Gideon; the enemies of Israel trembled with fear, and they were defeated. Fear is still debilitating today, and the enforcers of standard COVID-crisis policies come in at least four fearful flavors!

Make no mistake, the COVID virus is real, and people are contracting it, but the world’s overreaction to it is nothing short of self-propagated fearmongering. Scared people become the salesmen of the oppression when they justify their

We are genuinely in the midst of a pandemic, but it is a pandemic of contagious fear and hysteria. It is a plague of divisiveness and a plight of disinformation.

own fear by scaring other people into submission—it is cyclic perpetuation of fear. We are genuinely in the midst of a pandemic, but it is a pandemic of contagious fear and hysteria. It is a plague of divisiveness and a plight of disinformation. If the people are cast into frightful turmoil, the people will turn on each other, or worse, look to their incompetent government for solutions, and most of the time they will be standing ready with an already prepared remedy that will be worse than the illness. American President Ronald Reagan famously said that the nine scariest words in the English language are, “I’m from the government and I’m here to help.”

Is the mainstream media narrative scaring the sensibility out of you? In the face of plagues and wars, our Messiah said, “Don’t panic!” Also, God’s messengers repeatedly prefaced their message with, “Don’t be afraid!” Frankly, the Bible’s consistent message is to not fear unless you are not in right-standing with the Almighty. Fear Him only.

Further wariness of government should come from the simultaneous, sharp rise in the advancing of radical agendas that disturb societal health and undermine time-tested values—paired with too many local authorities’ inaction to assuage it or blatant support of it. In America alone, radical organizations took advantage of the COVID lockdowns as an opportunity to fill the streets and convene under the guise of “peaceful protesting” only to quickly turn into overt, masked rioters and unabated looters.

Justice warrior organizations that purport to underscore the grievances of one particular race or minority then turn and commit blatant hateful or hurtful activity against people of all color or status. Violent crimes and murders have skyrocketed during this pandemic, particularly in mismanaged cities that are now trying to defund or disband their police forces. Anarchists are destroying public, private, and law enforcement property in the name of the nebulous banner of “systemic racism” or alleged “systemic police brutality.” Sure, anyone loving justice will stand with the cause of a victim shown injustice, but vague charges of injustices caused by inanimate “systems” is no justification to riot and loot at all—it is a fabricated excuse that non-critically-thinking people will accept at face value.

In a strange real-time social experiment, America got a peek into what such “protesters” had in mind for the nation. The zone called CHOP or CHAZ in Seattle Washington was an area within the city with barricades and young guards marking its borders and patrolling those wishing to cross them. It should have been the Utopia that anti-police, anti-racism rioters dream of, alas it was an utter failure. It produced no goods, only consumed what others had worked to produce, had mafia style leadership, and had an astronomical crime rate per capita. Its borders included the homes of innocent people literally caught up in it and held there against their will by the border thugs while the hands of law enforcement were tied up in politics. If this is not how you want your country to

look, then take necessary actions to nip it in the bud.

Whatever the cause, demand, or goal of these violent pawns, a suspiciously large number of corrupt politicians (like Seattle’s leadership) are seizing the opportunity to prop up their poll numbers by brandishing to their trembling constituents an acclaimed perfect solution, albeit precisely what has already been devastating society.

In the midst of this deliberate push to topple freedom and traditionalist principles, the silent majority must make its voice heard, first and foremost to the Creator of us all in Heaven, but also to the elected or appointed officials that are proposing ineffective or freedom-destroying solutions. Sadly, too many religious leaders are choosing the easy way—folding to the pressure and unhesitatingly complying with all government demands and closures. Yes, there are several Biblical verses that call for obedience to government, but this government is described as “no terror to good conduct but to bad” (Rom. 13:3). If leaders terrorize good behavior or condone bad behavior, then they are antithetical to “government” proper; they are terrorizers.

How then should believers respond? First and foremost, we ought to be well informed. Take a balanced approach, reading even articles that you disagree with in order to gain clarity. Receive news from a variety of sources and think critically about the reports. Ask critical questions and then seek answers without immediately pressing your own convictions. The best way to learn is through active listening, not talking. But when you must speak, we can rely on wisdom from on High that the adversary will be unable to resist (Luke 21:15).

Does the Bible call us to get caught up



American President Ronald Reagan famously said that the nine scariest words in the English language are, “I’m from the government and I’m here to help.”

in politics and government; how can we pursue justice here? Well, we can glean important instructions on this from scripture. Yeshua regularly perplexed His opponents with silencing clarity, and Paul played on pre-existing divisions in the crowd to take heat off of himself. Both of them also posed very carefully worded questions to their opponents to dissolve tension. Being an imitator of Messiah requires us to be calculating and deliberate. In Matthew 5:39-41 are the teachings of turning the other cheek, giving your plaintiff your second garment, and walking the extra mile. Perhaps hidden from modern eyes lies herein a brilliant parallel.

A Roman could compel a non-Roman to carry a burden for him, and in Judea, that was typically a soldier compelling a Jew to carry his gear. But there was a stipulation on the distance before it was not legal. If you carried a Roman soldier’s gear more than one mile, the soldier is now on the wrong side of his own law, so carry it two—with a smile if you want to. As for the garments, a poor person in Israel typically had only two garments: one undergarment and one overgarment. If someone sues a poor man (as were most of Yeshua’s listeners) for his garment, go ahead and give him the other one too, so that not only is the defendant shamed, but others, including the greedy plaintiff, who see his nakedness are also shamed. As for cheek striking, the left hand was

“unclean”, so the striker used his right hand. To strike someone’s right cheek necessitates a backhanded strike—quite an insult—but striking the “other cheek” (i.e., left cheek) requires an open-handed strike which is used between equals. The point of Yeshua’s teaching was not for the righteous to be a punching bag; it was a teaching of nonviolent resistance. We are called to be wise as serpents while also harmless as doves. According to the example of Yeshua, we are not to get in a fight with an evil doer and become a martyr unnecessarily, but rather to resist evil nonviolently.

So why is this anti-hysteria COVID narrative that our proverbial “fellow” brings so underreported? The main answer is because of the fear that compliance and submission bring. This is a pandemic on retainer. Much like a business hires lawyers on retainer in case legal suits arise, so also incompetent or immoral leaders are suspending the terror of the COVID pandemic over the governed. Have they not already surpassed their initial timeframes and hinted at future second and third waves of the “killer virus”? If they have unreasonable mandates, then you could choose to fail to comply and reap legal woes which you will attempt to fight in a crooked and expensive court. But alternatively, comply in nonviolent defiance. Why not print “Tyranny” or “Oppression” on your mandatory mask? Or wear multiple masks, not only over

your nose and mouth but also your ears, hair, neck, shoulders and even eyes (safely) so as to silently communicate to your peers what a truly absurd requirement it is. Try making a habit of mumbling through your mask so that people simply cannot understand you, and then speak clearly when you lift your mask. It will change the way they think about the mandate. If you are contact-traced and told to self-quarantine, then leave your phone at home or get an anonymous phone. If you are in an enforced quarantine, keep a diary and publish it afterward to wake people up to what is happening. Be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove; by God’s help, good people should, can, and will topple the draconian subterfuge and return liberty, law, and order.

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A BIBLICAL VIEW OF PLAGUES

By Dror Shannon



Fortunately, writers often use the notion of “plague” as a metaphor because an actual physical plague or pandemic is rare. In Western civilization and its literature, our model for the word “plague” is the bubonic plague. That “Black Death” of the mid-1300s in Europe began in central Asia, and Mongolia, before spreading to Italy and throughout Europe. It surfaced again in about 1894 in China and spread via shipping routes to port cities throughout the world, infecting San Francisco between 1900 and 1904. Curiously, the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918 is credited with a similar number of deaths, but not with the same reputation as “The Black Death.” It did not actually originate in Spain, but news coverage about it did and so the name stuck. Unlike the case of the bubonic plague, however, the blame was not cast onto Jewish communities for the Spanish flu. Jews, having a lower death rate, were likely protected somewhat from the plague because once each year, they cleaned out their stores of grain for Passover, reducing their exposure to the

The sunlight of Ra was eliminated by darkness in the ninth plague. The firstborn, who represented the future rulership and priesthood of Egyptian civilization and culture, suddenly died overnight in the tenth plague.

rats which carried the plague-spawning lice. Other practices of cleanliness and isolation from illness may also have contributed protectively. On the other hand, Haredi Jews in New York and in Israel have been scapegoated during the COVID-19 “Corona” or “Wuflu” pandemic because their infection rates were higher due to their isolation from communications media which prescribed protective measures, and their resistance

to social distancing effects limiting prayer services, weddings, funerals, and the like. A measles outbreak aroused similar suspicions of the community for the rapid spread within its tight-knit community consisting of large families, with a density of living conditions, low rates of vaccination, and extensive international travel.

It has been all too common for people

Apophis was a snake-god who was not denigrated by a specific plague but rather when Moshe's staff-turned-serpent ate up those of the Egyptian court magicians.

to place the blame for a plague or other destructive event on some group, almost always for reasons that are superstitious rather than evidentiary, because actual evidence of causality is usually absent and unobtainable. Consequently, Jews have often been scapegoated because they are the people who are “different,” with unfamiliar customs or, in some religious views, condemned by God for some egregious sin. Therefore, it was presumed that punishing them would appease God’s wrath and relieve the general public of the punishing effects of the plague or other disaster. The modern notions of causality are even now often ignored in favor of conspiracy theories about some secretive group that wishes to cause mischief and harm. But I would like to look instead at some biblical examples, where the text does assign blame for some moral failing that has invoked HaShem’s wrath upon the Jewish community or some segment of it. Let us see if we can discern some common characteristics about the Jewish perception of what offends Hashem

and how to obtain blessing rather than cursing or punishment.

Out of 67 citations of the word “plague” in the text of the New American Standard Bible (23 in the Torah, 30 in the Prophets and Writings, 7 of which are in the psalms and 13 in the apostolic writings, all but one of which are in Yohanan’s apocalyptic vision), only about 15 of them actually show any indication of a specific reason for the plague. Others are more general references to a warning or concern about a potential for some outbreak of some plague, or references to one of the past plagues described in the Torah. None of them offer any new information about causes of plagues. I will not reiterate all of them, but only show selected samples that do offer some such information. Note that a plague may be other than a physical ailment or disease. One may suffer a plague of locusts, or frogs, or bloody water, or darkness, or sudden unnatural death of firstborn sons. It is characteristically something that afflicts many people rather than any single individual, even if it is instigated because of some particular individual. If there is any characteristic purpose for a plague, it seems to be to attract attention and focus it on something that should not have been done or that should be changed.

For example, in Genesis 12:17, “... HaShem struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Avram’s wife.” We can infer from this event that Avram should not have allowed Pharaoh to think that Sarai was an unmarried woman available for the taking, that Pharaoh should not have been so grabby, and that Pharaoh should not have permitted the development of that social environment in which Avram feared to tell the truth about his wife. Regardless of our possible critique of Avram, HaShem’s judgment struck at only Pharaoh, his ministers

who had identified Sarai as a desirable commodity, and perhaps some other collateral members or servants of Pharaoh’s household. We are not told the nature of this plague, but obviously it had to focus attention on Sarai in some manner in order to compel Pharaoh to summon Avram to demand an explanation. We have no further evidence regarding changes in Egyptian culture after a chastened Pharaoh had made restitution to Avram, returned Sarai to him, and sent them on their way, but we might imagine that Pharaoh and his ministers would not wish to repeat their mistake and would be much more careful about strangers. Perhaps they would have been a bit more hospitable, so that foreign travelers or traders might not fear for their lives or for unjustified seizure of their property. Alternatively, and less optimistically, the Egyptians might just have been more suspicious and careful to investigate any potential transaction more thoroughly. Regardless of what lessons these Egyptians may have learned, or not, we who study Torah can certainly learn political and social warnings from this event.

Egyptian Plagues of the Exodus

Next, we can examine the plagues that HaShem laid upon a later dynasty of Egyptians, all to one purpose: to force a change in Egyptian behavior that would release all the Hebrew slaves from burdensome oppression and mistreatment, as well as to impress upon them the power of the singular God to whom the Hebrews were dedicated. That confrontation alone would destroy the Egyptian religious structure and its political infrastructure. Note that this structure had developed only during the prior couple of centuries. Before that, Egypt was ruled by a Semitic people called the Hyksos, and Joseph

It does, however, presume a connection between a plague and some sort of departure from HaShem's ways.

had administered his grain collection and distribution program under their Pharaoh. Remember that from the time of HaShem's promise to Avraham before Isaac was conceived, only 430 years elapsed until the Jewish Exodus from Egypt. At least 2 centuries passed before Joseph died in Egypt. But sometime after Joseph died the Hyksos were overthrown by a new Pharaoh who did not wish to acknowledge the contribution that Joseph had made to Egyptian welfare. In fact, he viewed the Hebrews as a threat which he could only control by reducing them to poverty and slavery. So, during only about two more remaining centuries between Joseph's death and the Exodus, the Hyksos were overthrown; the new regime enslaved the Hebrews; they attempted genocide by suborning the midwives; Moshe ben-Amram was born, hidden, discovered and adopted by Pharaoh's daughter; and 80 years later he returned to Egypt to confront Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go.

Now, the nature of each specific one of the ten plagues undermined one of the Egyptian gods which represented things

that the Egyptians depended upon. Hapi of the Nile was symbolically slaughtered by turning its life-giving waters to blood in the first plague. The sunlight of Ra was eliminated by darkness in the ninth plague. The firstborn, who represented the future rulership and priesthood of Egyptian civilization and culture, suddenly died overnight in the tenth plague, perhaps as a condemnation of the presumed deity of Pharaoh himself. In contrast, the Hebrews' children lived, despite Pharaoh's condemnation of them, because a symbol of sacrificial blood was painted onto doorways in obedience to HaShem's command through Moshe.

The cattle disease of the fifth plague denigrated Hathor who was depicted as a cow, and it was probably a reflection of the former popularity of Hathor when Aharon produced the Golden Calf in the desert. Apophis was a snake-god who was not denigrated by a specific plague but rather when Moshe's staff-turned-serpent ate up those of the Egyptian court magicians. Here is a brief list of the other plagues and the corresponding Egyptian gods defeated:

The second plague, frogs coming from the Nile River, was against Heket, the Egyptian goddess of fertility, water, and renewal, who had the head of a frog.

The third plague, lice from the dust of the earth, was against Geb, the Egyptian god of the Earth, who was over the dust of the earth.

The fourth plague, swarms of flies, was against Khepri, the Egyptian god of creation, movement of the Sun, and rebirth, who had the head of a fly.

The sixth plague, ashes turned to boils and sores, was against Isis, the Egyptian goddess of medicine and peace.

The seventh plague, hail rained down

in the form of fire, was against Nut, the Egyptian goddess of the sky.

The eighth plague, swarm or storm of locusts covering the sky, was against Seth, the Egyptian god of storms and disorder.

There is one more verse I would like to examine before moving on, because it shows that a specific action was needed to avoid being affected by the tenth and final plague.

"The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt." (Exodus 12:13)

This reminds us of HaShem's direct involvement in striking the Egyptians and our own need for reassurance that His plague will not strike us also. It likewise points out that such assurance is based on our obedience to His instructions.

Plagues in the Desert

"When you take a census of the sons of Israel to number them, then each one of them shall give a ransom for himself to the Lord, when you number them, so that there will be no plague among them when you number them." (Exodus 30:12)

Now this doesn't specify what kind of plague this is, what it is about taking a census that creates some susceptibility to its occurrence, or how each counted person contributing a token half-shekel payment might prevent it. But what can we infer about the circumstances of such an event? Because the payment is identical for rich and poor alike, it is a reminder that each member of the



Because of the ten spies' report and the people's fearful discouraged reaction to it, HaShem was ready to wipe out the entire people and start over with Moshe alone.

community is of equal worth. This is especially significant when we consider that this census determined how many would be eligible to fight in the expected conflicts that were already envisioned upon entering the promised land and even on the way there. Perhaps the potential plague in this case would be a psychological, moral, and social one, if any number of community members might fail to realize that all were valued equally – fighters and non-fighters, rich and poor, alike. If squabbling broke out due to ill-

feelings of inequality or entitlement, morale would suffer even more and ultimately the community could fall apart due to factionalism. That is a recipe for all kinds of disaster and certainly no way to obtain the mutual cooperation needed to build a nation in a new land. Now this psycho-social speculation may not hold the actual explanation. An alternative could envision supernatural punishment directly from HaShem for not honoring His sanctuary and His appointed Levites by obediently contributing the specified

half-shekel tax – though that is not really hinted in the description of its collection or purpose. Or perhaps aspects of both views are appropriate to consider because the text does not tell us the nature of the possible plague.

The next verse provides us with a warning about the severity of a possible plague occurrence, but it does not specify any particular type of plague.

“If then, you act with hostility against

It is a rather different view of what may be deemed a “plague,” and it’s worthy of our consideration as we ponder what we may mean by using the word “plague.”



Me and are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you seven times according to your sins.” (Leviticus 26:21)

It does, however, presume a connection between a plague and some sort of departure from HaShem’s ways – and that it will be much worse if that departure is deliberately hostile to those ways or perhaps resentful against HaShem for recommending or requiring something.

“I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the sons of Israel, to perform the service of the sons of Israel at the tent of meeting and to make atonement on behalf of the sons of Israel, so that there will be no plague among the sons of Israel by their coming near to the sanctuary.” (Numbers

8:19)

Again, no particular type of plague is specified, but only that the Levites are designated as the only authorized personnel who may approach the sanctuary and perform its services. One may infer, however, that the Levites will receive special training to prevent them from profaning the sanctuary by accident, and that the ordinary Israelite could get into trouble because of approaching in the wrong way without the specialized guidance that the Levite training would provide. It is this model that impelled the Pharisees of a later era to define halachot of purification so that every Jew would pursue and maintain ritual purity, to avoid the dangers of impurity that would keep them away from the sanctuary.

Now, the next one represents a plague with a very specific cause, and rather clear medical consequences:

“While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very severe plague.” (Numbers 11:33)

The people had become ungrateful for the manna that they had to gather and prepare on six out of seven days. Despite what we are told about the variety of its flavors, the people craved the different flavor and texture of real meat. In this case it was prepared from wildfowl that were blown in by a strong wind, and we can infer that these carried some parasite or infection, maybe even a virulent virus. Thereby Jews learned

from hard experience the need for kashrut inspections of meat animals and birds and their edible products—which is more easily done properly of domesticated animals than of wild ones taken in hunting. Learning the lessons of gratitude to HaShem can be even more challenging.

“Even those men who brought out the very bad report of the land died by a plague before the Lord.” (Numbers 14:37)

This mention of a plague is interesting in that it is incidental to a larger context of rebellion and unwillingness to trust HaShem. Because of the ten spies’ report and the people’s fearful discouraged reaction to it, HaShem was ready to wipe out the entire people and start over with Moshe alone. Now, we might consider that a somewhat hyperbolic and exaggerated threat, but we might infer that HaShem was actually baiting Moshe to see how he would react. Moshe rose to the occasion and nobly defended both HaShem’s reputation among the surrounding nations and the people who did not deserve such consideration. That generation, however, was condemned to remain in the desert and die before reaching the land that they had refused to go conquer. Only their children, born free people in the desert, would become a confident nation to conquer and inherit their land. But what was the plague? Was there some other event that is glossed over in this chapter? Did it affect only those men, or were they merely mentioned in passing because they were included in the general condemnation of an entire living generation? Did this condemnation constitute the “plague” by which they would all die over the course of the next 38 years while their innocent children would live and cross over the Jordan river to inherit? It is a rather different view of what may be deemed a “plague,” and it’s worthy of

our consideration as we ponder what we may mean by using the word “plague.”

But this was not the final word on plagues in the desert. The next day after Korah’s rebellion was swallowed up by a subsidence event (250 men lost into a sinkhole in the earth), a plague broke out among the remaining dissidents who were appalled that their hero Korah and his followers were so suddenly invalidated and taken away. Was this a result of diminished immune system operation due to shock? Of course, the text describes it in terms of HaShem’s wrath, but the mechanisms by which He executes His decrees are sometimes detectable as naturally understandable phenomena. Regardless of how it was done, a life-threatening plague broke out and spread among the population. Then, perhaps, the smoke of the incense distributed by Aharon and his fellow Cohanim under his jurisdiction inhibited any aerial spread of the infection, perhaps it encouraged some “social distancing” and isolation of the non-infected from the infected, and perhaps the attitude and immune response of the people strengthened because of Aharon’s intervention and mediation. Speculations about the medical and psychological mechanisms notwithstanding, many were saved, and a large number died.

“Moshe said to Aharon, ‘Take your censer and put in it fire from the altar, and lay incense on it; then bring it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone forth from HaShem, the plague has begun!’ Then Aharon took it as Moshe had spoken, and ran into the midst of the assembly, for behold, the plague had begun among the people. So he put on the incense and made atonement for the people. He took his stand between the dead and the living, so that the plague was checked. But those who died by the plague were 14,700, besides

Recent archeology has uncovered explicit evidence of this dividing line between Israel and the Philistines in a fortified town called “Khirbet Qeiyafa” just southwest of Beit Shemesh.

those who died on account of Korah. Then Aharon returned to Moshe at the doorway of the tent of meeting, for the plague had been checked.” (Numbers 17:11-15 or 16:46-50)

The next episode is the incident of defection to the Ba’al of Pe’or, and the licentious rites encouraged by the Moabites in accordance with the advice of Bil’am. He could not curse Israel by means of prophecy from HaShem, but he told the Moabites how to entice Israel to curse themselves by idolatry and bring HaShem’s wrath down upon them.

This incident is described in Numbers 25, and it includes not only a plague, possibly STD infections received from sexual contact with Moabite women, but also deliberate executions of Israelite idolaters who had defected and were likely thereby to have been infected. Ending the plague required the extreme action of Pinchas spearing two prominent citizens to death, caught in the very act of fornication, in flagrante delicto, after Moshe had already instructed Israel's judges to execute all the idolatrous defectors. Subsequently, warfare continued against the Midianites. The episode is mentioned again in Numbers 31:16, "Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Bil'am, to trespass against HaShem in the matter of Pe'or, so the plague was among the congregation of HaShem." The context is Moshe's final declarations and actions in response to HaShem's instructions that he was to prepare for his impending demise. A significant portion of that was a set of instructions about how to deal with the Midianites who were also guilty of fomenting the Ba'al-of-Pe'or atrocity, including not to spare the lives of Midianite women who had been sexually active. The implication was that they would likely rekindle another wave of the plague if not prevented from interacting with Israelite men. The impact of this episode was so severe that its example continued to echo through the centuries, cited explicitly in Joshua 22:17 and Psalms 106:30, and obliquely in a few references to Bil'am ben-Be'or.

In several verses of Deuteronomy there are warnings about plagues that might result from departures from the Torah as part of a general list of consequences. Most of the subsequent references to plagues are references to events we have described above. Only a few references may provide additional insight into what were deemed causes of plagues, and how they were alleviated.

Other Plagues

"Woe to us! Who shall deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who smote the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness." (1 Samuel 4:8)

A pandemic is not necessarily a plague in the biblical sense, though we may use the term in a metaphorical or literary sense.

This was the fear voiced among the Philistines when the Ark of the Covenant was brought out to the battle site by Hophni and Pinhas, the sons of Eli who were elsewhere shown to be corrupt priests. These two were then killed in the battle by the Philistines, who then captured the Ark, took it to Ashdod, and subsequently had reason to regret it and wished to return it. Their god Dagon fell from his pedestal as if bowing before the ark of HaShem and broke in pieces; they were stricken by disease; some died; and they began to ask themselves after several months of this how to rid themselves of their plague, as follows:

"Then they said, 'What shall be the guilt offering which we shall return to Him?' And they said, 'Five golden tumors and five golden mice according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for one plague was on all of you and on your lords.'" (1 Samuel 6:4)

Altogether, the Ark was in Philistine hands for seven months. They then placed the Ark on a cart drawn by two milk cows and sent it to Beit-Shemesh which was along their "armistice-line" border with Israel at that time. Recent archeology has uncovered explicit evidence of this dividing line between Israel and the Philistines in a fortified town called "Khirbet Qeiyafa" just southwest of Beit Shemesh. The Israelites rejoiced and offered sacrifices, and the Philistines returned to their city of Ekron. However, you may recall that placing the Ark on a cart set a bad precedent that later caused trouble for King David and got his friend Uzzah killed because they did not return to the Torah's prescribed practice of transporting the Ark on poles in the hands of designated Levites. Holding the Ark in Beit Shemesh was also not healthy, because many there were also stricken and died by HaShem's hand. Thus, it came to be transferred to Kiryat Ye'arim, to the house of Eliezer ben-Aminadav for twenty more years of Shmuel's rule until David came to retrieve it.

Later, we see an odd episode, when HaShem was angry because of certain circumstances in Israel: He influenced David to take a census to determine Israel's fighting strength. We may recall that the Torah demands a half-shekel tax from each male in order to prevent a plague. But apparently, the Levitical system was not operating as it should (for lack of a proper altar) because David was instructed by HaShem's prophet Gad to acquire property on which to build one in response to the plague which did break out. Read the entire story in 2 Samuel 24,

One thing that will not benefit anyone is the spread of rumors about dark conspiracies.

but here, I will cite only the verses which address the plague. Note that, unlike my previous musing on the relevant Torah passage, the plague in this case was obviously not merely a psychological one.

“Then Aravnah said, ‘Why has my lord the king come to his servant?’ And David said, ‘To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to HaShem, that the plague may be held back from the people’...David built there an altar to HaShem and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. Thus the Lord was moved by prayer for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel.” (2 Samuel 24:21, 25)

Note also the parallel passages describing this event in the first book of the Chronicles that focus on King David:

“David said to God, ‘Is it not I who commanded to count the people? Indeed, I am the one who has sinned and done very wickedly, but these sheep, what have they done? O Lord my God, please

let Your hand be against me and my father’s household, but not against Your people that they should be plagued’... Then David said to Ornan, ‘Give me the site of this threshing floor, that I may build on it an altar to HaShem; for the full price you shall give it to me, that the plague may be restrained from the people.’” (1 Chronicles 21:17, 22)

For anyone who is curious about the variation in the name of the original owner of this threshing floor, it has appeared as Aravnah, Arnan or Ornan, or even Aranyah. Modern Israelis bearing a form of this Hebrew name are called Arnon. Were the ancient scribes not very precise about recording this name, or did ancient Israelites also engage in some of the same kinds of nicknaming? This is still practiced today: a “Shmuel” may be called “Shmulik,” a “Yeshua” may be called “Shuki,” an “Ariyeh” may be called “Arik,” or a “Binyamin” may be called “Bibi”? Perhaps the ancient Ornan or Arnon also was known by several nicknames. However, this has nothing to do with any of our plagues, not even linguistic ones.

I will conclude this discussion of plagues with the hope that we have developed here some sense of perspective about them. A pandemic is not necessarily a plague in the biblical sense, though we may use the term in a metaphorical or literary sense. But our response to either one should be a thoughtful consideration of the cause and how we may mitigate it or alleviate it. Is it caused or worsened by our collective behavior as a society? Does our individual behavior make us more or

less susceptible to becoming afflicted by it? Is it merely a natural disaster or a man-made one that challenges us to cope with it faithfully and to defeat it insofar as possible by mitigating its consequences and addressing its actual causes? Does it challenge us to repent of any actual wrongdoing or to prosecute any criminal transgressors? One thing that will not benefit anyone is the spread of rumors about dark conspiracies. If there are wrongdoers, they must be identified by diligent investigation and prosecuted according to legal standards. If there are prayers to be prayed, let them motivate us to seek out and to do what is right. This is why the Hebrew word for prayer, “lehitpallel,” is a reflexive verb that literally means to judge oneself. Our prayers reveal our innermost condition, both to HaShem and to anyone who hears us. May they reflect the Torah’s precepts, especially while we suffer the duress of a pandemic and whatever attempts are made to respond to it.

For further reading:

1. An essay online at: <https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/love-time-plague>, a religious musing on the current COVID-19 pandemic inspired by the thoughts of the French philosopher Albert Camus who wrote “The Plague” about a Catholic view of the bubonic plague and its consequences.
2. An essay online at: http://www.stat.rice.edu/~dobelman/Dinotech/10_Egyptian_gods_10_Plagues.pdf, a summary of the biblical plagues on Egypt.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dror encountered HaShem in his mid-teens through a dream that called him to the path of righteousness. He joined the then fledgling Messianic Jewish movement, married a nice liberal Jewish girl, and attended Conservative synagogues. He made aliyah, had three Israeli-born children, worked as an engineer, and served in the IDF. He had to return to America but came back after 22 years as a retired aircraft-systems engineer. He now volunteers as a border police officer and as a cantor for traditional Jewish services, and he teaches seminars and Jewish self-study groups on topics like Biblical languages and traditional Jewish subjects.

THE WORLD'S PRESENT-DAY PLAGUE

By Betsy Ramsay

The Corona pandemic with which people everywhere are now coping has very quickly extended its ugly tentacles over the face of the whole earth. Why is this? And what hints does the Word of God give us for the underlying reasons for plagues that have extinguished whole population groups and left death and disaster in their wake at various junctures in the history of human life on earth?

The Black Death in the years 1346 to 1353 is said to have been the most fatal pandemic in recorded history and yet it did not extend its cruel command beyond what was then the continent of Europe. And why was that? Obviously, it is because air travel did not yet exist in the Middle Ages, and travel by ship was not for everyone. But now, in the year 2020, humans can serve as carriers of the virus, often unknowingly, to every corner of the globe.

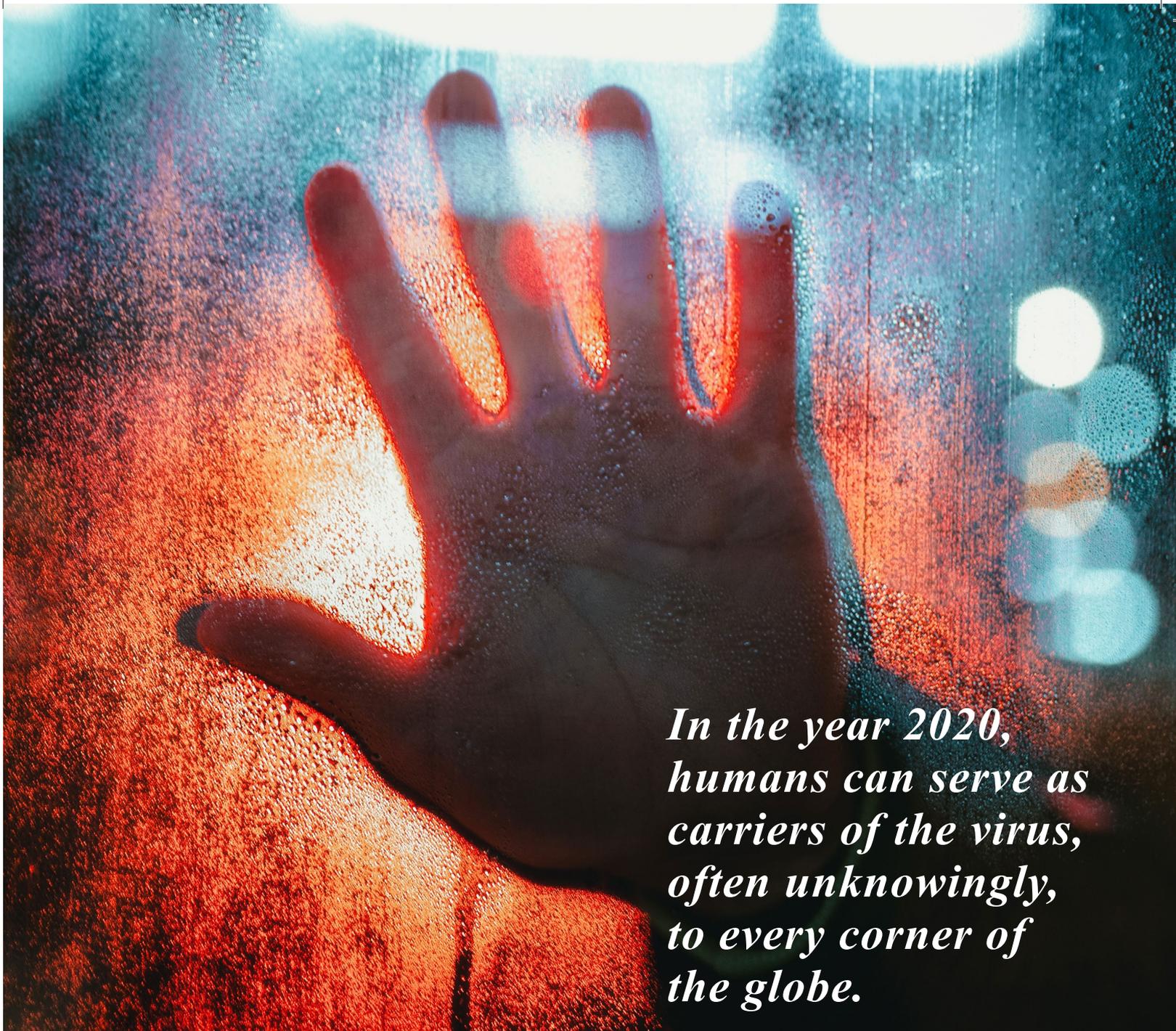
So, what information does the Word of God give us as to the reasons for plagues that have brought death and disaster to large population groups at various times throughout history? We read in a number of Biblical passages that the Lord sent

grim plagues against His people Israel as an expression of His wrath brought about by their highly offensive behavior. One example of this was the occasion when the Israelites began to intermarry with Moabite women and to worship the Moabite gods. From this story appearing in Numbers 25:8-9, we learn that before the plague had completed its ugly work, over twenty-four thousand Israelites had perished. Clearly, this was considered a very significant happening since the matter is mentioned again in the book of Psalms. In Psalm 106:28-30, we read another version of the same story of how the wrath of the Holy One of Israel was poured out in the form of a plague in response to His people's evil behavior. Verse 28 tells us that those who had intermarried with the Moabite women ate the sacrifices of the dead, and verses 37-38 relate that they went as far as to sacrifice their sons and daughters to devils pouring out the innocent blood of their own children to the idols of Canaan. They polluted the whole land with their blood.

As though anything could be uglier or more appalling, the Lord God in His wrath caused another plague to erupt in

connection with the return of the twelve spies from their enterprise of spying out the land. Instead of all of the spies bringing with them an enthusiastic report, we read that only Joshua and Caleb had faith to believe that the Lord God of Israel could do what He had promised and enable them to take possession of the lovely land of Canaan. The other ten spies had become shaky and discouraged and returned with a "bad report". Their report was termed "bad" because the ten spies not only lost faith themselves but also caused the Israelites to lose heart. They could see that this land was rich and fruitful, flowing as they had been told "with milk and honey," but they had also seen the giants.

So, what happened next when the people heard the negative report delivered to them by the ten fearful spies? Of course, their fear spread among the people and caused the whole congregation "to murmur against [Moses]." Then a new plague broke out, and we read in Numbers 14:37 that "these men that brought up the evil report upon the land died by the plague before the Lord." But what about Joshua and Caleb? Were they also infected by the contagion? This



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question is answered in the very next verse: “Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb, the son of Jephunneh...lived still.”

Another instance of a plague in Scripture that had its influence upon the whole household of Israel occurred on a slightly earlier occasion (Numbers 12) when Miriam and Aaron, the sister and brother of Moses, decided that Moses had more than his fair share of authority to make decisions on behalf of all the people of

Israel. For one thing, they objected to the fact that Moses had married a Cushite woman. Perhaps partly because of this, they presumptuously felt they, too, could hear from the Lord and play an important role in the task of leading the people.

However, the Lord God was not in agreement! He appeared on the scene and spoke to Miriam and Aaron, reprimanding them. He declared that He had a special relationship with

Moses with whom He actually spoke face to face. The Lord then asked them: “Wherefore were you not afraid to speak against my servant, Moses?” (Numbers 12:7-8) At that point Miriam was struck with the plague of leprosy and Aaron feared for her that she would spend the rest of her life disfigured by the illness. Aaron acknowledged that the two of them had sinned and acted foolishly, and then Moses had compassion on Miriam and prayed for her. With this, she was

instantly and miraculously healed, yet she was still required to stay outside the camp “in quarantine” for seven days before the whole company of Israelites could move on.

Up to this point, I have been giving examples of how the Lord’s people walked in disobedience, thereby bringing upon themselves the wrath of the Heavenly Father and the ensuing plagues. In my own way of searching for new light on the question of the causes for plagues, I penned a poem that I would like to share.

LONG FACES

*Today the pansies have long faces
As though they know what it’s all about,
As though the reason
For the present pestilence
Has been unveiled for the plainest flowers
While knowledgeable humans
Have yet to understand
Whether it be the work of a wicked
witch’s hand
Or the normal consequence
Of the arrogance we flout
In making our own rules
For what’s right and what’s not
And ripping away the ancient values
Ordained by God that they should last.*

The point I am making in this little poem is basically what I write in the final four lines. Speaking specifically of the Corona pandemic which we are all facing, I am asking where mankind has gone wrong in the way we are living our lives. This, I am suggesting, can be the underlying cause for the present worldwide pandemic, and

the answer would be, of course, that the “ancient values” or divine precepts and commandments defined in the Bible have largely been left behind by societies around world who for centuries had held to Biblical values as their life standards. Now, instead, we are making our own decisions about such matters as what gender we wish to choose for ourselves and whether or not to keep the child that has already begun developing in the womb.

Today, we are seeing what can be termed a contagious spread across the world of contempt for all that is good and a sickening delight in values that the Bible defines as evil. In Isaiah 4:20 we read, “Woe unto them that call good evil and evil good!” This is a very significant scripture in view, among other things, of a recent law passed by the governor of California in America forbidding singing in church services anywhere in the state! What an offense for anyone desiring to worship the Lord through music and praise songs! It is exactly as implied in the following lines of scripture: “All the foundations of the earth are out of course,” (Psalm 82:5) and “If the foundations be destroyed what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3)

But how many, even among regular churchgoers, take time to read the Bible nowadays, one might ask. Yet that is the place where we will find answers! There can hardly be a better location for finding the answer to the question posed in Psalm 11:3 than in the opening lines of Psalm 91. This psalm reads: “He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” To me this means that the closer we get to the Lord, the safer we will be, particularly since the psalmist proceeds to tell us, “He is my refuge and my fortress; in Him will I trust.” And in verse 6 we are admonished not to fear because each one who trusts in Him will

be delivered “from the noisome (deadly) pestilence.” Four times in this psalm the believer is specifically encouraged not to be fearful of a pestilence.

Another very remarkable statement in this psalm is in verses 7 and 8 where the psalmist goes so far as to say, “One thousand may fall on your right side and ten thousand on your left, but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you behold and see the reward of the wicked (or the sinner).”

This is certainly an amazing statement! Here we actually see stated that when the Lord sends a plague or pestilence, He will have a specific purpose. He is also saying that a plague can be intended to punish persons who have gone astray morally and spiritually. At the same time this is the one psalm in the Bible, as far as I know, that specifically assures believers not to fear a plague or a pestilence as long as they wholeheartedly love the Lord and seek to walk close to Him! Indeed, there is much in this psalm that should be noted with great interest.

Let us move on now to the prophet Amos where we read about a pestilence rising up under very different circumstances. In Amos 4:10, we read, “I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt...and have made the stink of your camps come up into your nostrils. Yet have you not returned unto me,’ saith the Lord.” Here we see again that the Lord sent a plague as a form of punishment, and, above all, a call to repentance. But the people failed to repent.

Then Amos, as the Lord’s mouthpiece, again pleads with the people of Israel in Amos 5:4 and 5:6, “Seek ye me and ye shall live!” Yet, they do not turn away from worshipping Moloch, the false god to whom babies were offered and murdered. The prophet pleads again in Amos 5:15, “Hate the evil and love the

We are talking of plagues that have taken their toll on large sections of mankind and that may often seem at first glance both meaningless and ruthless.

good and establish judgment in the gate. It may be that the Lord of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.” One can just feel the heartache of the Lord for His people when they refuse to turn from their worship of demonic powers and to put their trust again in Him.

So now we begin to grasp what some of the underlying causes are for the deadly and horrific plagues that periodically strike upon our earth. We are talking of plagues that have taken their toll on large sections of mankind and that may often seem at first glance both meaningless and ruthless.

The next passage that we will look at appears in Ezekiel 14. In this chapter, we see a very different picture. Here the

Lord again sends a pestilence because of the idol worship prevalent among the people of Jerusalem and the vicinity. Yet, among these people there are also some whom Ezekiel in verse 22 calls a remnant. These few have not departed from the ancient statutes and, therefore, are an example of right living for the rest of the population.

“And they shall comfort you when you see their ways and their doings...,” declares the prophet.” Then he proceeds to add: “...and you shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done [in Jerusalem],” saith the Lord God.”

So then what is this “cause” for which the Lord has struck the people with a deadly plague as well as with three additional harsh punishments that I have not mentioned? Should it not be quite clear by this time that the “cause” must, indeed, be the straying away of His people from true worship of the God of Israel and for turning instead to the worst form of idolatry expressed in the murdering of their own children?

In Ezekiel 14:11, speaking on behalf of the Lord Himself the prophet explains the cause for the harsh punishments clearly: “That the house of Israel may no more go astray from me, neither be polluted any more with their transgressions but that they may be my people and I may be their God.”

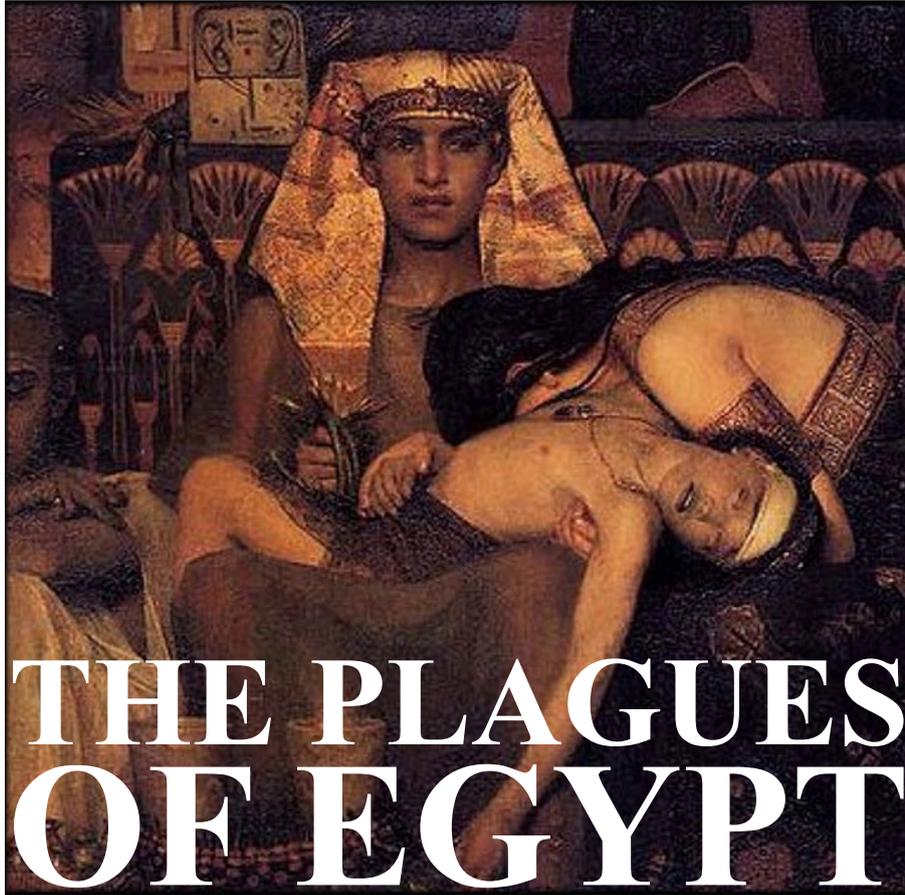
So, what can believers do now to help remedy the situation that people and countries across the globe are seeking to deal with in our present time? Is

there anything? There is a beautiful scripture in II Chronicles 7:14 that gives a clear answer to this question. This scripture takes us back to the period when King Solomon, son of David and Bathsheba, dedicated the first temple here in Jerusalem. After he offered many sacrifices and there was much rejoicing among the people, we read that the Lord appears to Solomon by night. At first, He acknowledges Solomon’s prayer and affirms that He has chosen this place as a house of sacrifice. Then, He proceeds with words of warning in the event that they cease to faithfully worship the Lord God in this temple. In II Chronicles 7:13-14 we read, “If I shut up heaven that there be no rain or if I command the locusts to devour the land or if I send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

So, what can believers who know and love the Lord do now, today? There is much. The second part of the scripture above gives a clear answer. What we believers (the people “called by the Lord’s name”) can do is to humble ourselves and pray in faith believing that our God hears and answers prayer. Then in the spirit of repentance, we can turn from whatever in our lives that is displeasing to the Lord. If we do not know what these things are, we can ask Him to show us! And the more who do this, the greater the likelihood that the Lord will perform a gracious work of healing during the times we are now living in here in our land!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Betsy Ramsay, American-born journalist, author, and teacher resided with her family in Sweden before moving to Israel in 1987. Betsy has authored twelve books, four of which are collections of her own, original poetry, and two are historical novels for children. She also has three full-color picture books for smaller children, for adults a personal memoir as well as the story of her Aliyah to Israel, and finally a story based on her German, Jewish grandfather’s account from the Holocaust both in English and in German.



THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT IN THE END TIMES

By Keijo Lindeman

*“For we know in part and we prophesy in part”
(1 Cor. 13:9)*

As in the days when you came out of Egypt, I will show My wonders. Nations will see and be ashamed, deprived of all their might. They will put their hands over their mouths, and their ears will become deaf. They will lick the dust like a snake, like reptiles slithering on the ground. They will crawl from their

holes in the presence of the LORD our God; they will tremble in fear of You (Micah 7:15-17).

When God delivered the people of Israel from the slavery of Egypt in the days of Moses, it was after the tenth plague by which the Lord punished Egypt and the proud pharaoh (Ex. 5-14). God made

wonders through Moses in the midst of Egyptians then (Ex. 11:9), and these wonders and plagues will occur again in the end time. The world will also see the final great exodus when God gathers his people back to their own land “not leaving any behind” (Eze. 39:28-29). When we turn to the Book of Revelation, we find there all the plagues of Egypt

All these plagues were directed against the idols of Egypt and the proud pharaoh who was considered the son of the sun-god, Ra, and a god himself according to the Egyptian religion.

occurring in the end time, such as they were, or in a modern form. One of these plagues is pestilence, a serious infectious disease.

Plague on Livestock in Egypt

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and tell him that this is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: ‘Let My people go, so that they may worship Me. But if you continue to restrain them and refuse to let them go, then the hand of the LORD will bring a severe plague (Hebrew *dever*=severe infectious disease) on your livestock in the field—on your horses, donkeys, camels, herds, and flocks. But the LORD

will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that no animal belonging to the Israelites will die.’” The LORD set a time, saying, “Tomorrow the LORD will do this in the land.” And the next day the LORD did just that. All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died. Pharaoh sent officials and found that none of the livestock of the Israelites had died. But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not let the people go (Ex. 9:1-7).

A severe plague on livestock was the fifth plague with which God punished Egypt. All these plagues were directed against the idols of Egypt and the proud pharaoh who was considered the son of the sun-god, Ra, and a god himself according to the Egyptian religion (Ex. 12:12). But the Israelites were kept safe from the plague on livestock and from all other plagues.

The Plague Killed the Firstborn of Egypt

“He unleashed His fury against them, wrath, indignation, and calamity—a band of destroying angels. He cleared a path for His anger; He did not spare them from death but delivered their lives to the plague. He struck all the firstborn of Egypt, the virility in the tents of Ham” (Ps. 78:49-51).

The Book of Psalms describes the tenth plague of Egypt. In his hot anger, God struck down the firstborn of Egypt. The plague went through the whole land of Egypt so that all the firstborn, the pharaoh’s firstborn included, died of a severe pestilence (Ex. 12:29-30). Only the firstborn sons of Israel were not touched (Ex. 12:21-23). Eventually God hurled the army of the pharaoh into the Red Sea (Ex. 14). This was the final blow to the proud pharaoh and Egypt for having enslaved and oppressed the

Israelites for centuries and for drowning their male children in the river crocodile ridden Nile (Ex. 1:13-22).

End-time Plague – A Sign of Yeshua’s Coming

“When you hear of wars and rebellions, do not be alarmed. These things must happen first, but the end is not imminent.” Then He told them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines, and pestilences (Greek NT *loimoi*; Hebrew *dever*) in various places, along with fearful sights and great signs from heaven” (and enormous storms, according to Aram. NT Peshitta) (Luke 21:9-11).

When Yeshua told his disciples about the signs of the end time and of his coming, he talked about many things that would tell that his coming was near (Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 21). There would be deception, natural catastrophes, violent

There would be deception, natural catastrophes, violent storms, rebellions (manifestations), rumors of war, fighting that would even lead to a global war.

storms, rebellions (manifestations), rumors of war, fighting that would even lead to a global war, turning away from faith, persecution, hard times and great tribulations. One of the signs of the Messiah's coming is pestilence.

Pestilence in Revelation

“Or if I send a plague into that land and pour out My wrath upon it through bloodshed, cutting off from it both man and beast, then as surely as I live, declares the Lord GOD, even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they could deliver neither sons nor daughters. Their righteousness could save only themselves. For this is what the Lord GOD says: ‘How much worse will it be when I send against Jerusalem My four dire judgments—sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague—in order to cut off from it both man and beast?’” (Ezek. 14:19-21).



“And when the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” Then I

looked and saw a pale horse. Its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed close behind. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill by sword, by famine, by plague (Greek NT: thanato=death; Hebr NT dever=pestilence), and by the beasts of the earth” (Rev. 6:7-8).

In Ezekiel's day, God was angry at Israel because of their sins and idolatry. God threatened to discipline his people with four dire judgments: sword, famine, plague, and beasts. Not even the three righteous men, Noah, Daniel and Job, if they were in the midst of the people, could save the people from judgment. These three righteous men would only save their own lives because of their righteousness.

When the Lamb, in Revelation, opens the fourth seal, similar judgements are poured on the ungodly world in the end time: sword, famine, plague and wild beasts. In the modern world wild beasts like lions, bears, and panthers are not so great a danger to man as man is to them. The text refers to the beastly kingdoms of the end time, about which Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 speak. These four plagues, severe infectious disease included, strikes a fourth part of the earth.

In the past, a global pandemic called the Spanish flu made havoc in the years 1918-1920. It was caused by a remarkably deadly H1N1 virus, a mutation of influenza A. The worst stage of the pandemic lasted about eighteen months. The number of deaths is estimated to be from 39 to 100 million. In recent years there have been epidemics of Asian flu, swine flu, bird flu and SARS. At the end of 2019, coronavirus emerged in Wuhan, China, wherefrom it has spread all over the world. Because of this pandemic, emergency procedures and laws have been enforced in most countries to restrict freedom of movement and public

God has given good instructions thousands of years ago to the people of Israel, and when they followed these instructions, they enjoyed better health than other people.

gatherings. Elderly people and people belonging to a high-risk group have been advised to stay at home in quarantine. For the first time since the war, the Finnish Government was authorized to use emergency powers. All around the world millions of people have been infected and hundreds of thousands have died, especially aged and sick people. There is a danger of a second or even third wave of coronavirus pandemic which delays the end of this pandemic and kills more people.

This pandemic has caused chaos in economic life which may bring about recession, bankruptcies, and an increase in unemployment and national debt. Many people think that life will be permanently changed after the coronavirus pandemic. The situation is uncertain; no one knows what the future



When the plague killed the firstborn of Egypt, Israelites were safe. God told them to stay indoors, in their homes (“in quarantine”), as the plague passed by striking down all the firstborn of Egypt.

will bring. People walk like blind men when there is no way to see clearly into the future, just as the prophet Zephaniah has prophesied would happen when the great day of the Lord is near in the end time (Zeph.1:14-18). This plague of coronavirus pandemic is just a reminder from God for us to repent and turn to the living God and give Him the glory. Unless this happens, we may expect much

worse things to happen (Isa. 13:9-13).

Corona in the Book of Proverbs

“A man’s spirit sustains him in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?” (Pro. 18:14).

In the Hebrew Scriptures this verse reads as follows: רִיחַ אִישׁ יְכַלְכֵּל מִחֲלָהוּ וְרוּחַ נְכֵאָה מִי

רוּחַ אִישׁ יְכַלְכֵּל מִחֲלָהוּ וְרוּחַ נְכֵאָה מִי (Ruach ‘ish yekhalkel machalehu veruach nekhe’ah mi yisa’annah).

The Aramaic Targum here uses the word כּוּרְהַנְיָה for “sickness” which sounds a lot like “corona”. Corona in the Aramaic text does not mean “crown” but “sickness, infirmity”. Therefore the first part of the verse reads as follows, “A spiritual man endures his corona



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(sickness, weakness)...” Corona, meaning weakness or sickness, is found dozens of times also in the Aramaic Peshitta texts of the Bible (e.g. Deut. 29:22; Matt. 8:17; Luke 13.12).

This pandemic has caused chaos in economic life which may bring about recession, bankruptcies, and an increase in unemployment and national debt.

Masks and Quarantine in the Torah

“A diseased person must wear torn clothes and let his hair hang loose, and he must cover his mouth [Hebrew: upper lip, mustache] and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean!’ As long as he has the infection, he remains unclean. He must live alone in a place outside the camp” (Lev.13:45-46).

During this coronavirus pandemic, the authorities have given instructions and orders on how to behave. All people must take not to become infected, and those already infected must take care not to infect other people. Big events and gatherings, such as festivals, sports events, and the like are forbidden or restricted during the pandemic. People must keep a safety distance between each other and a mask covering the mouth and nose is recommended. The mask is obligatory for those involved in health care.

There is nothing new here. God already gave through Moses similar instructions on how to prevent leprosy from spreading. People who had contracted the disease were obliged to live isolated,

in quarantine, and cover their mouth (mustache). They had to shout “unclean, unclean” so that healthy people would maintain a safe distance from them. God has given good instructions thousands of years ago to the people of Israel, and when they followed these instructions, they enjoyed better health than other people.

Israelites Saved by the Blood of the Lamb

Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and told them, “Go at once and select for yourselves a lamb for each family and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a cluster of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin, and brush the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out the door of his house until morning. When the LORD passes through to strike down the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway; so He will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down” (Ex. 12:21-23).

“The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb



of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

“They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (Rev. 12:11).

“A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it” (Pro. 22:3).

When the plague killed the firstborn of Egypt, Israelites were safe. God told them to stay indoors, in their homes (“in quarantine”), as the plague passed by striking down all the firstborn of Egypt. Israelites had put some blood of a slaughtered lamb on the sides and tops of the doorframes of their houses, and the plague did not touch any of them.

This is what is going to happen in the end time. When the coronavirus pandemic is spreading in Finland and all over

the world, the government and health care authorities have recommended to avoid gatherings and stay indoors (in quarantine). This is vital for the aged and the sick.

Believers’ safeguard is the blood of the Lamb of God, Yeshua the Messiah, that He shed on the cross as atonement for our sins. It is by the power of the blood of Yeshua that believers overcome the powers of darkness. It is also good to follow the orders given by the authorities and avoid taking unnecessary risks. A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge.

God is the Believer’s Refuge

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, “You are my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” Surely He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler, and

from the deadly plague. He will cover you with His feathers; under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the calamity that destroys at noon. Though a thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand, no harm will come near you (Ps. 91:1-7).

The most important piece of advice against the pestilence and plagues of the end time is, “Trust the Almighty God!” The Bible tells us that even the hairs of our head are numbered (Mt. 10:30; Lk. 12:7). If a hair falls down from our head, we do not even know it, but God does. Nothing happens to God’s own people without His knowledge and permission. Let us not be afraid. Let us trust in God and take refuge under the atoning blood of Yeshua and follow the advice of the authorities. Eventually, everything turns out for the best for God’s children.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Corona and Me

By Netivyah Staff

If I would have titled a blog like this before the Coronavirus outbreak, most everybody would have thought I was referring to the relationship between me and my wife or some other lady, or possibly my favorite beer or a certain car model. However, things have changed. I imagine if my wife were named Corona, she would have changed it by now. Even our vocabulary has changed. Who, besides some professionals, would ever have used words like lockdown, facemask, quarantine, isolation, social-distancing, and the likes with any frequency?

It feels like our world is changing rapidly, and many of us wonder if these might be the “end times.” Maybe there is truth to that, but could our lack of awareness of history play a considerable part here? Could it be that the end-times have been among us for quite some time longer than we were aware?

When I visited China in the aftermath of the SARS epidemic, I was struck how everyone there was wearing a facemask. In my naivety, I thought those masks were probably a recent invention by the Chinese specifically for coping with the disease outbreak. However, only recently, I saw some pictures from nearly 100 years ago that seem to have been taken today, were it not for the lack of color in it.

My Grandfather

My grandfather happened to have exactly the same name as I have. He was, however, born 63 years before I was. When he was 25 years old, a similar thing happened in the world as what we are experiencing now, only on a much bigger scale. Who of us had ever heard much about the so-called Spanish Flu? It started when WWI came to an end in 1918, and it continued well into 1920.

“Avoid crowded gatherings in closed places. Avoid contact with others as much as possible. Don’t even shake hands when saying hello.” This was the ninth directive in a list of guidelines published in the February 1920 edition of the Hebrew newspaper “Do’ar Hayom” when the pandemic known today as the Spanish flu raged all over the world – including in the Land of Israel. (Source Jerusalem Post).

This flu infected approximately half a billion people—almost a third of the world’s population—and killed tens of millions. My grandfather’s first wife and their only child died in 1921, and although it might not have been from the flu, it could well have been. My grandfather married again, and his eldest son from that marriage was my father.

Many of us wonder if these might be the “end times.” Maybe there is truth to that, but could our lack of awareness of history play a considerable part here? Could it be that the end-times have been among us for quite some time longer than we were aware?



My Great-Great-Grandfather

There are records of my ancestors a number of generations before that. During the Spanish occupation of the Southern Netherlands (present-day Belgium), one of my ancestors fled around 1575 to the city of Leiden in the Northern Netherlands to escape the Spanish persecution of protestants. In 1603, three of his four children and his wife died in the bubonic plague pandemic, leaving only him and one son alive. This son was my great-great-grandfather.

The Black Death, also known as the Pestilence and the Plague, was the most fatal pandemic recorded in human history, resulting in the death of 75-200 million people in Eurasia and North Africa. The Black Death is estimated

to have killed 30% to 60% of Europe's population between the years of 1361 and 1815.

One last gem that I discovered in my genealogical research is about an ancestor of mine that made pilgrimages to the Holy Land. The sources are not clear, but it appears that after her third journey to the Jerusalem, she died on September 26, 1176 and was buried here. Is it mere coincidence that centuries later I find myself in the same city?

Now, why do I write all this? We have to learn from the past to understand the present and the future. This will help us to put present situations into perspective instead of rushing to speculations of apocalyptic scenarios. It will also help us to see God's hand throughout world

history as well as in our own personal history.

It is no accident that I am who I am. Had God let my ancestor perish in the 1603 plague together with his siblings, I would not be here today. Also, what if my grandfather's first wife had not died in 1921? Thinking of the possibilities reminds me of Romans 8:28, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

So, has everything changed or rather "what has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl. 1:9)? So why should we have any fear in this present pandemic since we can trust that God will use it for good in our lives?

COVID-19, RISING ANTI-SEMITISM & ISRAEL

By Netanel R.

“How lonely sits the city, that was full of people!”

Lamentations 1:1

I never thought I would live to see the day when the streets of Jerusalem would be so empty. At least on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) there are many people walking the streets and dressed in white and there is a sense of reverence for God. Right now, there is almost nobody walking or driving anywhere and while some are turning to God in the midst of this crisis, the word “Corona” is the word heard in the conversations between the few who are still venturing out for the occasional breath of fresh air. The one comforting thing is that at least the city is not actually empty of people as was the case in the opening verse of Lamentations.

The Ministry of Health in Israel has done

an excellent job of preparing for the Coronavirus from the start. They put out warnings even before any Israelis had fallen ill with the virus, and nurses and doctors were prepped for the threat of an outbreak.

However, the hospitals of Israel were already facing a crisis before Coronavirus hit. A shortage of hospital beds and outdated medical infrastructure has left Israel’s medical system hurting for much needed budget adjustments at a time when Israel has now gone nearly an entire year being governed by an interim government that has failed to address the needs of the medical system. Prepared or not, Coronavirus now trumps all other medical emergencies, and volunteer

Living in Israel comes with its own risks; there are terrorist groups on literally all sides of Israel seeking its destruction.



Online anti-Semitism is at its worst, and anti-Semitic rallies have shown that even in hard times, the crisis becomes a new excuse for anti-Semitism.

organizations are having to step in to assist with distribution of medical supplies and aid for non-Corona patients.

The outbreak in Israel has now infected tens of thousands and several hundred have died. The Ministry of Health has determined that the solution is near total lockdown of the country. People are now prohibited from going to the very places that health professionals would normally encourage you to relax and get much needed sun and fresh air. Beaches and parks are off limits for leisure time, even though medical professionals are saying that such places are beneficial if not crowded. Israel is not discerning between crowded or not. People have

been arrested for spending time on the mostly deserted beaches of Israel.

Next, even the number of people who can be in a single car will be limited. No one knows how best to respond to the crisis and so authorities choose full lockdown in Israel. The people most threatened by this virus, the elderly, are also the people who should be resting on the beaches and in the parks, but social distancing and fear of overcrowding in public places has led to a mostly desolate looking Israel right now.

As social distancing has turned into near total lockdown in Israel, businesses have also been shut down or severely

limited in their operation. Restaurants and hotels are either entirely shut down or limited severely in the services they may provide. Some hotels are offering hosting options for quarantined individuals to allow for at least some revenue. Restaurants are limited to delivery only, but many restaurants do not have the capacity for that. Most businesses are shut down entirely, though.

Israel's economy has been flourishing despite the political stalemate until now, but it seems that as businesses all over the world have taken a hit from the crisis and as the unemployment rate in Israel soars to new highs, Israel's economy is in for a crushing blow.

It may come as no surprise that with a bunch of people stuck at home and relying heavily on the internet for information during this pandemic, online anti-Semitism is at its worst, and anti-Semitic rallies have shown that even in hard times, the crisis becomes a new excuse for anti-Semitism. A number of Synagogues holding online gatherings have reported hackers attacking them with threats and anti-Semitic accusations. Racism comes in many forms. Jews are not the only targets of racism, but the Jews do get special attention from a number of different racist groups.

right now claim that the Jews are the cause of the pandemic or that they are making the world believe in a pandemic that does not even exist. Others have even gone so far as to not only deny that there is actually a pandemic but to claim that the only real pandemic is the Jewish people.

Although many countries in the west boast of combatting racism in general, and some even boast of fighting anti-Semitism specifically, the reality is that many of these anti-Semitic views and attacks are largely underreported and

Many Jews immigrating to Israel from Europe have indicated that rising anti-Semitism in Europe and the poor response of governments is their reason for moving. And yet, living in Israel comes with its own risks; there are terrorist groups on literally all sides of Israel seeking its destruction. Were it not for the grace of God, Israel would have been wiped out hours after the declaration of independence in 1948 and on numerous occasions since then.

Countries such as Germany are now dealing with widespread, radical-

Last year some 1,839 anti-Semitic attacks took place in Germany. In America, although not quite as bad, still one Jew on average is the target of a violent anti-Semitic attack each day.

There are a couple of anti-Semitic claims right now in connection with the pandemic which we, who know the truth about Israel and the Jewish people, should be quick to boldly dispel whenever it is in our power to do so. Some views being promulgated online

receive insufficient response leading many Jews to end up in uncomfortable and sometimes very dangerous situations with anti-Semitic groups that are not only allowed to spread their hate but also may carry out attacks before authorities will do anything about them.

Muslim anti-Semitism despite their post-WWII efforts to specifically combat anti-Semitism. In Germany, an average five anti-Semitic attacks happen every day. Last year some 1,839 anti-Semitic attacks took place in Germany. In America, although not quite as bad,

still one Jew on average is the target of a violent anti-Semitic attack each day.

One especially surprising finding as we face the new normal in light of the pandemic is that among social networks, Facebook (whose founder is himself Jewish) has seen the greatest number of instances of anti-Semitic posts blaming Jews for the pandemic. Facebook typically does a better job of censorship than social networks such as Twitter for instance (which typically sees among the highest number of hate speech posts of any major social network with some 58% of anti-Semitic posts on social media typically originating on Twitter).

As we face the new normal and increased uncertainty during these strange times, let us not lose sight of the truth. Let us be a light in dark places and as we encounter the hideousness of anti-Semitism, may we speak up. Let those who stand on the walls of Jerusalem and those who stand with Israel and the God of Israel not be silent when the lies of the enemy are being spread around us. God bless you and all of us with the strength and the boldness to be bearers of light no matter what the new normal may be.

Now, more than ever, we need prayer in

this nation. Praise God for the many who are turning to God at this time.

Pray with us: For Israel's democracy as the government, if functioning fully, must play a key role in addressing the challenges presented by the Corona crisis on top of what were already challenging times in Israel. This past week, the Knesset was shut down for nearly a week as the Speaker of the Knesset used the Corona crisis as an excuse to avoid a vote on his replacement. He has since become the first Speaker of the Knesset in Israel's history to resign, but even his resignation was an act of defiance against the checks and balances in Israel's democracy and an attempt to further delay legislative efforts (since his resignation would have left him in power an additional 48 hours were it not for an unprecedented ruling in the supreme court of Israel). If he had not resigned, he most likely would have become the first ever speaker of Knesset to be fired, a sign of trying times in Israel's politics and a time of new and unfortunate precedents. And then in a surprising turn of events, the head of the Blue-White party, Benny Gantz, became the new Speaker of the Knesset with the blessing of Netanyahu, the Likud and the Right side of the political spectrum in Israel, but violating the trust of many

of the 61 Knesset members who had previously backed Gantz as the candidate for Prime Minister.

For Israel's medical professionals who are facing major challenges balancing both the ongoing medical needs in Israel aside from the Coronavirus along with the now massive outbreak and increasing death count from the virus in Israel.

For Israel's economy which is barely hanging on by a thread and is likely to suffer immensely from this crisis.

For the people infected with the Coronavirus and for their friends and families, especially for the families of those who have died.

For the millions in Israel doing their best to practice social distancing and to abide by government regulations as they are prescribed.

May we see His deliverance in these times, just as our people did over and over again throughout the millennia. He is the same God yesterday, today, and forever!

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There's a lot more to Netivyah than meets the eye; the Teaching From Zion magazine is only one of our outreach and humanitarian ministries. We invite you to connect with the other branches of our ministry.

Congregation

Roeh Israel, "Shepherd of Israel," is a Messianic Jewish Congregation in Jerusalem. The Congregation is made up of followers of Yeshua, both Jews and non-Jews, who worship together in a traditional synagogue environment.



Humanitarian Aid

There are many families in Israel, even entire sections of the population, who fall between the cracks. Hamotzi Food Distribution Center is a place that literally brings forth food for local needy families in Jerusalem. Without charities and organizations like Netivyah, they would not be able to put food on the table.



Publications

Publishing is one of Netivyah's top priorities, as we see education as being central to our existence. Visit our website for previous issues of Teaching from Zion, as well as a selection of our books.



Video Teachings

The world is watching videos online, so we are producing high quality teaching videos in English and Hebrew and publishing them on the internet to continue to present the Good News to the world in its original Jewish and Hebrew culture.

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