

Newsletter April 2020

In this newsletter, we shall deviate from posting our customary newsletter Articles to candidly discuss a contemporary issue that is far too serious to ignore. The nations of the world are currently being invaded by a virtually invisible enemy about which little was previously known and against which there is no current defense. We are of course speaking of a Coronavirus designated as COVID-19, which is currently spreading across the entire world. It had apparently originated within infected bats. From there it is alleged to have mutated through animals, held for slaughter, to humans in a “wet market” located at Wuhan, China. Whatever the actual source, it had festered and spread through China for some time before the world at large became aware of it. Shortly after that, it rapidly spread outside China and soon became a world pandemic.

There is currently no vaccine available to slow the spread of this pandemic, and given the necessarily long trial periods to prove a new vaccine’s safety and effectiveness, none is likely to be made available to the public for a year or perhaps longer. Common symptoms of this viral infection are fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Most healthy individuals will recover in a matter of a few weeks, but some can develop serious symptoms. If left untreated within especially susceptible persons, particularly the elderly, it often results in pneumonia that can become deadly. Carriers of this disease may not immediately exhibit any symptoms, and they may not become evident for some five to fourteen days. Presently, there is no prescribed treatment for those whom it invades; although, some clinical trials are currently underway testing an experimental antiviral drug (remdesivir) as well as a readily available drug, hydroxychloroquine, which is currently being used to treat malaria and rheumatoid arthritis. Obviously, all of this information is subject to revision as we learn more in the days ahead.

Current recommendations in the United States, for those who become symptomatic are to rest, keep well hydrated – and stay at home both to slow the spread of the virus and to prevent overloading limited medical facilities. In the absence of a preventive vaccine, “social separation” of all individuals is being recommended to slow the spread of the disease. People are asked to maintain a separation of six to ten feet. If severe symptoms such as high temperature, chest pressure, or trouble breathing should develop, they are being advised to call their medical professional for instructions and possible hospitalization. Hospitals will not admit patients without a doctor’s written directive, and they are also severely limiting visitors to prevent potential spread of the virus. Accordingly, governmental agencies have been closing down all nonessential venues and businesses where people congregate in large numbers such as team and spectator sports, bars, restaurants, and many workplaces both large and small. Currently, essential businesses include groceries, pharmacies, banks and gasoline stations. Fast food restaurants can still remain open, but only for carryout trade. Nevertheless, all businesses must be considered essential to the economy, and that list is expected to expand considerably over time.

Although COVID-19 is often referred to as “novel” with respect to its specific characteristics, pandemics are not new. In order to put the current pandemic into perspective, we note in the list below a few pandemics that this world has previously experienced beginning with the earliest that took place in the mid second century and ending with the most recent within the twenty-first Century.

- **AD 165:** The Antonine Plague, was likely smallpox or measles, it killed 5 million people in Asia Minor, Italy, and Greece.
- **AD 541-542:** The Bubonic Plague of Justinian, mainly spread by fleas from small animals, killed 25 million throughout Europe within one year.
- **AD 1346-1353:** The Bubonic Plague, aka The Black Death, killed somewhere between 75 and 200 million people in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Even as this plague ended, it would pop up again at various other times and places.¹
- **AD 1852-1860:** A Third Cholera Epidemic, caused by polluted drinking water, was believed to have its origin along the Ganges River in India. It killed 1 million people in India, Asia, Europe, North America and Africa.²

¹ Such a re-occurrence took place in AD 1527 when it struck Wittenberg, Germany. As many people fled the city in fear of their lives, the great reformer Martin Luther and his pregnant wife Katharina, remained in the city to care for those who had become infected.

² There have been seven major cholera pandemics in history. But it was the third of these that is considered the deadliest

- **AD 1910-1911** A Cholera Pandemic killed at least 800,000 people in Asia, Europe, North America and Africa. By isolating the source, the death toll in the United States was held down to only 11 people.
- **AD 1918-1920** The Spanish Flu H1N1 Pandemic, killed 20-50 million people and had infected somewhere around 500 million worldwide.
- **AD 1956-1958** The Asian Flu, H2N2, affecting China and the United States, killed 2 million people consisting of roughly 70,000 in the United States alone.
- **AD 1968** The Hong Kong Flu, H3N2, Pandemic killed 1 million people nearly worldwide that included the United States.
- **AD 2009-2010** The Swine Flu, H1N1, Pandemic infected around 700 million–1.4 billion people worldwide and killed over 18,000.
- **AD 2005-2012** The HIV/AIDS Pandemic killed around 36 million at its peak worldwide.

Thus, we realize that plagues, epidemics, and pandemics are quite common in today's world, which are increasingly getting more frequent and even more deadly. The current Coronavirus is the most recent, and it proves that point in its rapid spread and rapidly rising death toll. Modern medical science has developed to the point that every nation on earth has sought to reduce the death toll rather than just wait until the pandemic runs its course, as they could only do in the past. Combating this disease carries with it various unintended consequences that greatly disrupts the daily lives of many in an effort to save the lives of a few. Certainly, our common humanity requires nothing less of us, for we have all been created in the image of God. A significant concern centers on this current pandemic's longevity; how long will it be with us and what will its aftermath look like?

The financial toll on businesses, workers and on governments attempting to forestall this disease is already monumental. As testing has improved and become more readily available, it has been determined through statistical studies that the death rate of COVID-19 is likely at or even below one percent. Along with that discovery, the United States legislature, at the direction of the President, recently passed a two-trillion dollar recovery package in an attempt to bolster the economy before it experiences irreversible collapse. Meanwhile, the Coronavirus continues to spread exponentially through the general population; such that when Americans do return to work, the pandemic could be greatly exacerbated and the death toll would surely rise as a consequence.

That said, let us now explore what this present pandemic may mean in a greater theological context from a biblical Christian worldview. The earth as well as man was created perfect and in harmony with each other and with their Creator (cf. Ge. 1:31). There could have been no hurricanes, earthquakes or disease in that once perfect world. Regrettably, we no longer live in that world. After Adam's fall into sin, all that changed; nature went out of control and instead of it working in harmony with man, it was accursed and became his adversary (cf. Ge. 3:17-19). As a result of Adam's embrace of evil, nature also became an instrument of evil. Therefore we rightly refer to natural disasters and pandemics as "natural evil." Nevertheless, just as God often uses flawed sinful men to serve Him, nature too must obey Him, such that natural disasters and pandemics ultimately serve his purpose.

The spread of disease is referred to as "pestilence" in the Old Testament, wherein that word is found forty-seven times quite often seen as a judgment sent by God; thus, we find many parallels to today's pandemic in the Old Testament. Of course, "pestilence" is not currently being used to describe the current pandemic in our advanced secular age, and virtually no-one understands it a judgment sent from God. The words pestilence, epidemic or pandemic is not found within the New Testament.³ Nevertheless, there has been many plagues, epidemics, and pandemics recorded in secular history that parallels the Church age, as we have seen.

We must ask ourselves what this current pandemic means. Does it mean that God is beginning to judge mankind for their arrogant rejection of Him and the salvation He has offered through the death of his Son, Jesus Christ? Has mortal sin now become so egregious and rampant that God must act lest none could be saved from this froward generation? Even so, we must realize that a pandemic will one day occur that medical science and

³ A similar word, "plague" appears ninety-seven times in the Old Testament, but it is found only once within the New Testament in Revelation 16:21 where it is described as a great hail of huge stones from Heaven as a final judgment on all of sinful mankind just before the Millennial Age begins.

human government can do nothing about, for in that coming day neither will exist. Certainly every Christian who has carefully studied the Holy Scriptures, and has delved into the book of the Revelation ponders this; for he or she understands full well that a day of reckoning must eventually come. This judgment will come about as Jesus breaks open the seal of a scroll in Heaven giving him absolute ownership of the inhabited earth. We find that text in the first eight verses of Revelation Chapter 6, which reads as follows:

“And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer” (Re. 6:1,2).

The white horse is both a symbol of authority and of peace. This is not Christ, but a man who will threaten and boast of his great power. Yet as we can see, his boast is empty inasmuch as he carries no arrows for his bow; the power he exercises is empty threats and mass deception that leads to a delusion of peace gained through raw power. In the human sense, his rise to power has come about because of human sin leading to the moral degeneration of societies, religious institutions, and governments culminating in political and moral chaos and anarchy causing mankind to become desperate for peace.

“And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword” (Re, 6:3,4).

The future Antichrist will have gained full control over the entire earth. Nevertheless, he has only brought about a tenuous delusion of peace, inasmuch as evil and corruption will grow in the world like a festering sore until an eruption of violence becomes inevitable. The consequence of that underlying rebellion is revealed as Jesus Christ opens the second seal. This time, a red horse (red signifying a bloody war) will go forth upon the earth, and “power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.” This great global war could be over in a very short time assuming that very sophisticated weapons are utilized.

“And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine” (Re. 6:5,6).

The black horse of famine must then inevitably go forth. Although it is probable that a large percentage of the earth’s population will have been destroyed by the weapons of war, there will still be a very large population remaining, many of which will starve to death because the processes of food production and delivery will have been destroyed.

“And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth” (Re.6:7,8).

Here is the passage in which we find a great pandemic described the likes of which the world has never before experienced. The pale horse is commonly interpreted to mean a “diseased horse” that carries pestilence upon its back as a rider. This horse is a carrier and as it goes forth, its rider leaves death in its wake – and the grave immediately follows. This indicates that this disease is extremely deadly. Men who contract this disease will become easy prey for the beast of the earth – of both the animal and human varieties.

We can be certain that this current pandemic is not the fulfillment of this prophecy inasmuch as the Political Antichrist has not yet appeared to take his place as the despotic ruler of a global government. Moreover, the great world war that rides upon the red horse and global starvation that rides upon the black horse has not preceded this current pandemic. Nevertheless, this current pandemic is somewhat like it such that it should garner our attention to the extent that we would repent of our sins and turn to Christ. God has sent it our way as He has others before it as a warning of our need to repent before it is too late.

Men and women die every day from one cause or another. Some from a common disease, some from violence, some from sudden accident, and others from advanced age. Yet it is those who die from the most unusual causes that ordinarily gains our attention. Jesus spoke concerning this as follows:

“There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Lu.13:1-5).

From this text, we find that we were all born into a great pandemic of sin, thus carrying within us a seed of destruction inherited from Adam, our first ancestor. We have continually rejected God’s precepts; we have ignored his wondrous grace so lovingly offered in Christ; we have ruined his image that was originally engraved in us through the corruption of our minds and our bodies; and, we have dishonored and openly blasphemed his Name. Certainly the world has much to repent of as we face this current pandemic together. We have blatantly sinned in the rejection of our Creator and of his common grace intended for our good. In a previous newsletter of August 2019, we discussed this worldwide religious, moral, and political decline that is currently well underway, as a preamble to a coming judgment of God that no man or human government can withstand. The human race is tearing itself apart through the ongoing “sexual revolution” that is destroying the nuclear family through its utter depravity. Moreover, the human race is destroying its very future through the abortion of unborn children in the womb of their mother. This current pandemic is most definitely a judgment sent from God as a warning to the reprobate of the earth to repent. Some of us will die of the current COVID-19 pandemic and some from other causes, but the all-important thing is that we must repent of our sins before that hour. If we don’t repent, we shall all likewise perish for eternity, regardless of who we are, or how our when our bodies die.

In the last days, all will know that God is the LORD. While final judgment will take place in the last days just prior to the return of Jesus Christ to establish his Kingdom Age, that time may not be as distant as many may think; if the current rate of decline continues unabated, it could be not much more than a decade or so away. Perhaps God is using this current pandemic as a means of forestalling that decline for a time. It humbles us by threatening to separate and isolate us from each other. Perhaps God plans to speak to us in this quiet separation to awaken us to the greater judgment that is coming.

Even so, we find that the Church of Christ is at the forefront of this judgment, for she also has much of which to repent as liberal churches increasingly move into a state of final apostasy – ultimately denying Jesus Christ, who is her Cornerstone, Lord, and Namesake – her very reason for being.

“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God” (1Pe. 4:17)?

At a time when the Church should be reaching out with the Gospel, many have begun moving their worship services onto the internet in an effort to avoid suffering this current judgment. Obviously this move to a “virtual gathering” is very disruptive of Christian fellowship; but on a more positive note, it may also serve to spread the Gospel beyond the rigid walls of the church to those who need to hear it. Although many of us now “assemble” via the internet for corporate worship, it lacks the tangible personal reality of the unity that we share and enjoy in Christ. For that reason, some churches have chosen to ignore the governmental directive – denying any governmental authority over assembling as being a violation of the First-Amendment right of religious assembly. However, the current enemy knows no boundaries and spares no one it encounters.

Therefore, virtual gathering must do for now, lest we arrogantly tempt God and fail to truly love our brothers in Christ as ourselves (cf, Mt.4:7; 22:39). We should be thankful for our common fellowship and unity that physical separation cannot erode or destroy. In this trying time, let us diligently pray for each other, for all those who will become inflicted by this disease, and for the health and safety of the courageous medical personnel who are on the front-lines of this ongoing war against perverse nature. The Lord willing, this current judgment shall soon pass over us, and we shall once again greet and meet together as one in the body of Christ – in the flesh. Let us together hope and pray for that day. Until then, may God bless and keep you safe, and may He guide you in every thought and deed through his Word that so richly dwells within you. *Arthur J. Smith, April 2020.*