

Covid Musing – July 1, 2020 God’s Judgement NSMC – Dan Graber

It’s normal for us to wonder about the end times. And I’m sure we wonder if the coronavirus is a judgement from God. Some say it is the earth responding to the way it’s been mistreated. These and other questions like it are normal in such times as these. So please read and reflect on this article. It may be helpful for us to also look up the scripture verses.

The Pandemic as God’s Judgment

Does the biblical pattern of disaster and discipline with a call to repent apply to COVID-19?

By Todd Mangum May 15, 2020 Christianity Today

Is this pandemic God’s judgment against us? This is a difficult question to ponder. To ask it, I do not presume ourselves to be under either the blessings and curses of theocratic Israel or the apocalyptic doom of Revelation. However, I do see patterns of biblical teaching indicative of God’s ongoing engagement in the affairs of human life and his willingness to use extreme measures to accomplish his purposes.

When confronted with disaster, Scripture calls us to look to God for both comfort and self-censure. Prophets from Moses to Malachi point to sin and the need for repentance as reasons behind various disasters. Likewise, John the Baptist and Jesus launch the New Testament with prophetic warnings and calls to repentance.

Early in Romans, the apostle Paul observes, “the wrath of God is being revealed ... against all ungodliness and unrighteousness” (1:18, ESV). To the Corinthians, Paul holds up Old Testament patterns of judgment as “types,” “examples to us”—historic precedents to heed (1 Cor. 10:1–12; Rom. 11:20–21). When chastising the Corinthians for desecrations of the Lord’s Supper, Paul warns, “why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep [have died]” (1 Cor. 11:30). Paul labels sickness and death as a “judgment” (v. 29), even for these New Testament believers. Hebrews 12, citing Proverbs, tells believers in the same vein, “do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, ... for the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant” (Heb. 12:5, 11, ESV).

Does the coronavirus pandemic fit as divine judgment and discipline?

It is important to clarify that God’s wrath comes with mercy (Hab. 3:2; 1 Chron. 21:13). We can discern his mercy in the pattern of smaller catastrophes preceding greater ones, granting opportunity for repentance sooner rather than paying larger consequences later. The ten plagues of Egypt increased in severity in part because, early on, Pharaoh and his people “did not listen,” but rather “turned and went into his house with no concern even for this.” (Ex. 7:22–23, NASB). How quick are we to dismiss extraordinary acts of God as quirks of nature, forces we can harness with enough resilience and resourcefulness? Scripture labels this mindset hardening the heart (Ex. 8:19; Prov. 28:14). It is dangerous.

Some will demand prophetic confirmation of any divine judgment. But given the full and clear teaching of canonical Scripture at our stage in redemptive history, we are owed no more prophetic confirmation than the rebuff of such expectation at the end of Jesus’ parable about the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:27–31).

Nevertheless, the Lord has raised up poignant prophetic voices in our midst, from Jeremiah Wright, Jim Wallis and Diane Langberg to John Piper and James Dobson. While none of them claims inerrant inspiration, each has sounded loud notes of biblical warning. Jeremiah expressed God’s frustration at how

his people stubbornly closed their ears to (mostly unnamed) prophets “sent again and again” (Jer. 25:4, 29:19). Perhaps this indicts us too.

What must God do to get our attention?

God may disrupt the human cycle of selfishness by awful means and call us to account. Global pandemics thankfully are rare, but when they do occur, they usually spread through trade routes of prosperous, powerful nations—inherently prone to prideful pursuit of profits and indifference toward God (Deut. 8:10–14). Is this pandemic part of a larger pattern? Consider other catastrophes that have struck North America over the past 20 years: 9/11; Superstorm Sandy; hurricanes Katrina, Maria, Irma, and Harvey; California wildfire; (Floods and Fires in Canada) Midwest tornado spikes; swine flu, and now COVID-19. Have we hardened our hearts so as to write off a warning as mere acts of nature? Shouldn’t we rather ask if we could be under divine judgment?

We need not look far for reasons. God opposes the proud and uses catastrophe to undermine arrogance. James 4:13–17 calls out the “sin” of living life as functional atheists, operating as though God is paying us no real attention, presuming our security lies simply in planning and protecting our profits. James 5 calls down severe judgment on the rich—in our day, we who put “In God we trust” on our mammon had best take heed.

God’s passionate concern is for the vulnerable—the orphan, the widow, the immigrant, the refugee. The Lord will not allow prosperity devoid of such concern to stand (Ex. 22:21–24; Deut. 10:16–20; Isa. 10:1–4; Jer. 5:28–29; Amos 4–8; Mal. 3:1–6). “Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered” (Prov. 21:13).

If this pandemic is a judgment from God, our response should not be **to point a sanctimonious finger** at others but to lament and repent, with prayers like unto Daniel 9:3–19, where the person of God owns and confesses “our sins” and pleads for God to “forgive us” (2 Chron. 6:36–39, 7:12–14). In such moments we are most in sync with prophets like Habakkuk and Jeremiah. Sharing their lamentations, we also are put in position to observe: “And yet, your mercies are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness” (Lam. 3:23).

Human sin in such times can be redeemed by God for greater purpose. Besides instilling fear of the Lord, plagues historically have prompted people to prepare for the afterlife. Jesus underscored the transience of material things and the foolishness of building one’s life on such sand (Matt. 7:24–27). Christians need not fear death. Confidence in Christ and eternity has led many to give their own lives to minister to the sick and dying, a visible witness to resurrection hope.

Followers of Christ are not called to pronounce God’s condemnation but rather to examine themselves. Our own repentance serves as one aspect of our larger kingdom mission to relieve suffering, mourn with the grieving, care for the sick, encourage the weak, and comfort the afflicted even as we plead for God’s mercy. With this pandemic, I see the seriousness of God’s demand for repentance and receive any discipline God may intend as coming from the hand of my loving Father.

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