

THE PALMETTO REMINDER

“stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder” (2 Peter 3.1)

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Is This From God?

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by David McClister

Is the Coronavirus a warning from God? Is this God sending a wake-up call to the world to turn to Him? Is it a punishment for faithlessness?

There certainly are Biblical precedents for such an interpretation. For example, in Deuteronomy 28, God warned the Israelites about the things that would happen to them if they did not keep their covenant with God. Diseases are mentioned as one of the things God would do to indicate to His people that they were not being faithful. *“The Lord will smite you with consumption and fever and with inflammation and with fiery heat ...”* (v 22) and *“The Lord will smite you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed”* (v 27). See also vv 58-62. In the book of Revelation, God sends economic hardships against Rome, along with famine, pestilence, poisoned water, etc.

Some people might be tempted to jump to the conclusion that the Coronavirus is exactly this. I suppose that one could make a case for it. I, for one, would be hesitant to rule the idea out completely. But there is an element of the Biblical picture that does not appear in our present situation, and I think that element makes a big difference when we are asking whether or not we should understand the Coronavirus to be a warning sent from God.

The element that is missing in the present situation is a clear identification by God and a clear warning from God that He was going to do this. In the Biblical pattern, God does not just send diseases and other hardships upon a people and hope that they will figure out where it came from (although the ancients would have been quicker to figure it out than we are!). In the Biblical picture, God *tells* people what He will do as punishment, and He *warns* them about it. Unless I missed it, God has not said that He would send this virus on the world for its unfaithfulness. In the absence of a clear indication from God’s word, we should be cautious about the conclusions we draw. The fact is that there is another explanation for what is going on.

I think that the reason some people might be tempted to think that the Coronavirus is a judgment from God is because this came so suddenly and spread so quickly. Because it is basically unprecedented in our lifetime, some people may be tempted to think of it as some kind of divine action.

We must remember, however, that we live in a fallen world. We live in a world cursed because of sin, cursed as the consequence of sin. Disease is part of that curse. Disease comes with living in a cursed world. If we identify the Coronavirus as a specific plague from God, then why don’t we identify other diseases – or all diseases – this way? Unless we think that God arranges and executes every detail of

every moment of our lives, we should not necessarily think that getting sick is a judgment or warning from God. The logical end of such thinking would be that everyone who gets sick (with any illness) is being judged directly by God. I don't personally know any Christians who would subscribe to that. (Please refer to Jared's sermon from last Sunday as well.)

The Biblical picture is that when God is going to send disease or some other such punishment upon a people, He tells them that. He tells them in advance so that there will be no mistake about what is happening and why. God warned the world before He sent the flood in Noah's day. The plagues on Egypt were announced beforehand. God told Israel that the famine in Elijah's time would happen because of their worship of Baal. God told Israel that the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the people into a foreign land would be the result of their sin. God told the city of Tyre that He would destroy them and told them how He would do it. If we use

this standard of measurement, I personally am inclined not to attribute the Coronavirus to the hand of God as a worldwide judgment and warning. It does not fit the Biblical pattern.

Could this be a "message" from God? Yes, it *could* be. But my point is that this is not how God normally "sends messages" to a sinful people. And if anything seems clear, God acts toward us according to His established patterns, so that we will be able to judge things correctly. When I look at the whole picture, then, I am inclined *not* to interpret the Coronavirus as a judgment from God.

If anything, what the Coronavirus has done is that it has reminded us of just how messed-up our sin-stricken world is. We live in a world of sickness, difficulty, and death. It makes us long even more to live in the new heavens and the new earth which God has prepared for the faithful, a world in which none of these things will be found. 