

## LESSON 2 of 2

*“And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.” -- Luke 21:11 (NKJV)*

In the Gospels, in answering the inquiry of the disciples regarding the end-times, the Lord Jesus warned His disciples that **“pestilences”** will be one of the signs of the **“last days”** of human history ... **a time of shaking the world “to wake up” and realize that Christ’s return** to judge and

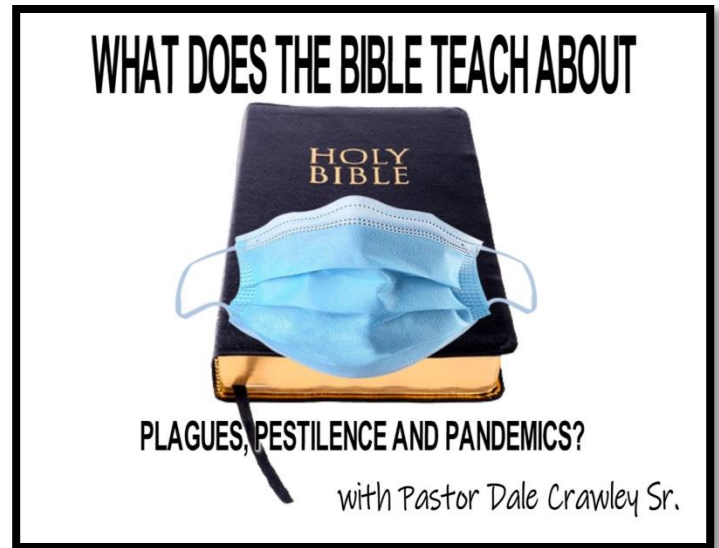
reign over the earth is increasingly imminent! Now with a global pandemic that is reaching an epic proportion in sickness and death, questions regarding divine judgment have become more frequent.

**Is this COVID-19 global pandemic God’s judgment against us?** This is a difficult question to ponder. I do not presume our-selves 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 the book of 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 Corinthians 10:1–12; Romans 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”** (Hebrews 12:5, 11, ESV).



**Previously in Lesson 1, we stated that the Bible gives us many examples of how God uses diseases to accomplish His purposes. Namely examples of: Individuals Inflicted with Terrible Diseases ... **Nations** Inflicted with Terrible Diseases ... and **Prophecies** Concerning Future Pestilences and Plagues. Continuing that thought let us look at ...**

## **2. Examples of Nations Inflicted with Terrible Diseases**

- In the Book of Exodus, we read of God using terrible plagues, including horrific diseases, to execute judgment against the nation of Egypt, and to draw the Israelites closer to Himself. Such plagues are central, of course, to the famous account of Passover. **Yet it is worth noting that before the judgments began, God specifically warned Egypt's leaders of what would come if they would not humble themselves and obey the Lord.** "Then the Lord said to Moses: Go to Pharaoh and speak to him, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me." For if you refuse to let them go and continue to hold them, behold, the hand of the Lord will come with a **very severe pestilence....**" (Exodus 9:1-3, NASB)
- Repeatedly in the Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the nation of Israel is commanded how to deal with pestilence and plagues when they come. Genuine repentance, atonement and turning back to God in a healthy, Biblical relationship are the most important directives. **Yet the Lord also instructs the nation of Israel about the vital importance of personal hygiene and social distancing in combatting infectious diseases such as leprosy** (see Leviticus chapters 13-15).
- In the Book of Numbers, we read that God allowed a plague of disease to execute judgment against unrepentant Israelites, and to shake the rest of the nation of Israel in an attempt to draw them closer to Him. (Numbers 16:41-50, 25:1-9)
- In the Book of 1 Samuel, we read how the Lord God **sent a plague against the Philistines** living in and around Gaza because of their chronic and unrepentant sin. (see 1 Samuel chapters 5 and 6)
- In the Book of Ezekiel, the Lord God **warned that the city of Sidon** (located in the country we now call Lebanon) would be struck with terrible diseases as a divine judgment for unrepentant sin. (Ezekiel 28:20-24)
- There are so many more examples found in the Books of Jeremiah, Amos, and Habakkuk, all of which came to pass in history, just as foretold.

### **3. Examples of Prophecies Concerning Future Pestilences and Plagues.**

The Lord God warned the children of Israel that terrible diseases would result from chronic, unrepentant sin. (Deuteronomy 28:15-22 - Deuteronomy 28:58-62)

*The Lord God also repeatedly warned the nations of the world beyond Israel ... that terrible diseases would be inflicted upon them in the future both as judgment for chronic, unrepentant sin, and to shake the nations and draw them to the Lord.* (Ezekiel chapters 38-39, Jeremiah chapters 49-50, Zechariah chapter 14)

**The Book of Revelation – No fewer than 12 times in the Book of Revelation, the Lord God warns that terrible pestilence and plagues will come to the nations of the earth as part of His judgment of sin, prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.** This period is known by Bible scholars as the “Great Tribulation” (Revelation 7:14), and it will involve the most devastating period of divine judgment for unrepentant sin in all of human history!

### **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 (Deuteronomy 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 and west coast wildfires; Midwestern and East-coast tornado spikes; Swine flu, and now COVID-19. Have we hardened our hearts so much ... as to write off a warning as mere “acts” of nature? **Maybe we really need to be asking the question ... Could we indeed be under divine judgment?**

### **Does the coronavirus pandemic fit as divine judgment and discipline?**

The reality is ... some will always demand prophetic confirmation of any divine judgment. But given the full and clear teaching of 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’ teaching about the rich man and Lazarus!

*“<sup>27</sup> Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' <sup>29</sup> Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' <sup>30</sup> And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' <sup>31</sup> But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'”* -- Luke 16:27-31 (NKJV)