

COVID-19: A PUNISHMENT TO THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD AND CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH

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Abstract

God created man with free will, that is to say, man has the right to do what he/she wants to do under the universe. Free will gave man the right to worship God or to worship Satan, but God alone can judge man's activities in the world. In Genesis chapter six (6) the first generation of human beings did what pleases them, their sins were so pronounced that the fallen angels came down to have sex with a human being, and giants were born to them. The sins of humanity were much that God himself regretted of creating man. Though being the first generation of human beings, with knowledge and wisdom, God had no choice but to kill them all with a flood, except Noah's wife and his three sons and their wives. Using the descriptive and historical phenomenological methodology, the research revealed that God continues to punish humanity from generation to generation. Therefore, this paper investigates the new virus called COVID-19 which claimed thousands of lives and restricted countries and regions from movement and worship. Furthermore, the paper looks at the Church as the solution to the pandemic, and challenges to those Christians who don't know their right as called out people. To this end, the paper recommends among others that the Church has the lasting solutions to end COVID-19, therefore, the government of all levels, regions, and countries should not interfere with Church activities.

Keywords: Covid-19, Punishment, Church, Religion, Government

Introduction

Coronavirus stagnated the world over in its highest apex in 2019 and 2020, putting the whole world at its standstill, and rendering every medical effort, world power countries, and developed countries unfit to withstand the pandemic. Many nations, kingdoms, countries, and continents have to go back on research to different laboratories and schools of study to bring lasting solutions to the pandemic. Millions of poor and wealthy people lost their lives in developed countries like the United States of America, China, India, Brazil, Russia, Italy, and the UK. And many countries are still suffering to date.

The socio-economic power of every country was crippled because of the wave of the coronavirus, these were because markets, schools, worship centers, and industries, companies where people can meet to produce things for the development of the countries were closed down as a result of the spread of the pandemic. The national and international movements were closed and controlled in some developed countries. Business transactions were limited, and inflation of prices on commodities became the order of the day. The means for livelihood for individuals in various countries become difficult because of the influxes of COVID-19 in countries and Territories

COVID-19 is not a new pandemic disease as some people assume, it has been there in some countries, but not well noticed by many countries until 2019 to the present date. Srikanth et al revealed that CoV was discovered during the 1960s. The Coronavirus Study Group under the international committee on Taxonomy of virus used the principle of comparative genomics to further assess and partition the replicative proteins in open reading frames to identify the factors that differentiate CoV at different cluster ranks. CoV is associated with illnesses of varied intensity. The most severe type resulting in large-scale pandemics in the past is the SARS (in 2002-2003 and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) (in 2012), (2020).

The questions that the researchers are demanding for answers are if COVID-19 was discovered in the 1960s, why was the virus limited to a few localities? Why should the virus react after forty-two to forty-three years when many countries began to multiply, and iniquities of various kinds began to surface in the world in 2002-2003? And why should the virus be silent for sixteen to seventeen (16-17) years, and rain down in full force when the iniquities of the world have reached

its apex? Could it be a punishment from God? These are questions that gave birth to this research work.

What is COVID-19?

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is defined as an illness caused by a novel coronavirus now called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2 formerly called 2019-n CoV), which was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan city, Hubei provinces, China. It was initially reported to World Health Organization (WHO) on December 31, 2019. On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency, on March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, it is such a designation since declaring H1N1 influenza a pandemic in 2009, David, (2020).

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Hussin A, Rothan & Siddappa, agree that coronavirus is one of the major pathogens that primarily targets the human respiratory system. Previous outbreaks of coronavirus (CoVs) include severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)- CoV and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). CoV which have been previously characterized as agents that are a great public health threat, (2020, p.1).

World Health Organization (WHO) reported on 23 April 2020 that, the first human cases of Covid-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus causing COVID-19, subsequently named SARS-CoV-2 were first reported by officials in Wuhan city, China, in December 2019. Retrospective investigations by Chinese authorities have identified human cases with onset of symptoms in early December 2019, while some of the earliest known cases had a link to a wholesale food market in Wuhan, some did not. Many of the initial patients were stall owners, market employees, or regular visitors to this market. Environmental

samples taken from this market in December 2019 tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, further suggesting that the market in Wuhan city was the source of this outbreak or played a role in the initial amplification of the outbreak. The market was closed on 1 January 2020.

The Biblical Views of Pestilences (COVID-19)

Pestilence is a deadly disaster, usually a disease that affects an entire community. Pestilence is contagious, virulent, and devastating. For example, the black plague in Europe that killed over thirty percent of the population during the late Middle Ages was a pestilence, Got Questions Ministries, April, (2021).

In the Bible, pestilence is usually a sign of God's judgment on the nation or people group (Deuteronomy 32:24; 1 Chronicles 21:12; Ezekiel 7:14-15). The God who protects and blesses is also the God who sends disaster and pestilence when it accomplishes His righteous purposes on earth (Isaiah 45:7; Ezekiel 5:16-17; Amos 4:10). Pestilence is promised as part of God's final judgment on the world in Revelation 18:8.

The word translated "pestilence" is often translated as "plague" or "disaster" in new versions of the English Bible. However, because the word is often paired with both of these, it may imply greater devastation than mere physical disease. Pestilence incorporates any forms of public and mass destruction and often accompanies famine (Ezekiel 7:15) or war (Jeremiah 21:9). Jesus forewarned of pestilence where He described the end times (Luke 21:11).

After David's sinful Census, the Lord brought judgment upon Israel in the form of pestilence: "The Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from morning until the appointed time. And the people died from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men" (2 Samuel 24:15 ESV). God had also sent pestilence in the aftermath of Korah's immorality at Baal Peor (Numbers 25:9), but the epidemic recorded in (2 Samuel 24) was the most deadly ever to hit the Israelites. Then God had mercy and halted the judgment: "when the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord relented concerning the disaster and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, 'Enough! Withdraw your hand'" (verse 16).

Our sovereign God is Lord of any pestilence (Habakkuk 3:5). He promises protection for those who trust in Him: "You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. (Psalm 91:5-6). Whatever happens, the Children of God do not need to fear.

Jesus Christ is our protection against the righteous judgments of God. For everyone who submits to the lordship of Jesus, God “canceled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14). Those who are “in Christ” need never fear pestilence or any other judgment.

Among the various forms of judgment that God brings upon the unrighteous and rebellious is pestilence. Not every epidemic is the direct judgment of God, but the Bible indicates that some instances of pestilence in history have been a punishment for sin. God sent pestilence to punish the Israelites for their ongoing idolatry and disobedience (Deuteronomy 32:24; Jeremiah 42:22), and during the tribulation, He will send pestilence to punish the unrepentant: “The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land and ugly, festering sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped its image” (Revelation 16:2; cf

Revelation 18:8, Matthew 24: 7) we never have to experience God’s pestilential judgment if we will accept His protection through faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:12; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Any sudden fatal epidemic is designated by this word, and in its Biblical use, it generally indicates that these are divine visitations. The word is most frequently used in the prophetic books, and it occurs 25 times in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, always associated with the sword and famine. In 4 other passages, it is combined with noisome or evil beasts or war. In Amos 4:10 this judgment is compared with the plagues of Egypt, and in (Habakkuk 3:5) it is a concomitant of the march of Go from the Arabian mountain. There is the same judicial character associated with pestilence in Exodus 5:3; 9:15; Leviticus 26:25; Numbers 14:12; Deuteronomy 28:21; 2Samuel 24:21; 1Corinthians 21:12; Ezekiel 14:19,21. In the dedication prayer of Solomon, a special value is sought for such petitions against pestilence as may be presented toward the temple (2Chronicles 6:28). Such deliverance is promised to those who put their trust in God (Psalms 91:6). Here the pestilence is called noisome, a shortened form of (“annoy some”, used in the sense of “hateful” or that which causes trouble or distress. In modern English, it has acquired the sense of loathsome. “Noisome” is used by Tyndale where the King James Version and the Revised Version (British and American) have “hurtful” in 1Timothy 6:9. Acts 19:8 the King James Version writes “persuading the things” (the Revised Version (British and American) “as to the things”), for “present the things persuasively”. And in Galatians 1:10 (the English Revised Version and the King James Version, not in the American Standard Revised Version) and 2 Corinthians 5:11, there is a half-ironic force in the word:

Paul's enemies have accused him of using unworthy persuasion in making his conversions.

The Latin word pestilence is connected with pestis, "the plague," but pestilence is used of any visitation and is not the name of any special disease; debher is applied to diseases of cattle and is translated as "murrain". In the New Testament pestilence is mentioned in our Lord's eschatological discourse (Matthew 24:7) the King James Version; Luke 21:11) coupled with famine. The assonance of loimos and limos in these passages (loimos is omitted in the Revised Version (British and American) passage for Mt) occurs in several classical passages, e.g. Herodotus vii.171) the pestilence is said to walk in darkness (Psalms 91:6) on account of its sudden onset out of obscurity not associated with any apparent cause. Therefore, from the above-mentioned scriptures, the COVID-19 can be seen as the punishment from God for the increase of sins from humanity.

Causes of God's Punishment on Humanity

God wants his people to work according to his will, anything short of his will, he will punish the evildoers. From time immemorial, God has been punishing the people that sin against Him, either in groups or individually. In Genesis, God punished Cain as an individual, "so now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand". When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth. And Cain said to the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear! Surely you have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me, Genesis 4:11-14 NKJV.

Apart from giving individual punishment to people, God also punishes nations, Kingdoms, Countries, and the whole world. In the Old Testament time, God punished the whole world because of the corruptions and wickedness of the people toward one another. The Bible reveals that:

The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, the end of all flesh has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth, Genesis 6:11-13.

After the great flood that destroyed lives and properties in the whole earth, and only allowing the Obedient Noah and his families to survive the flood, God continues to punish the sinners at any given time, He promised to send COVID-19 on anyone that work against His plan, he told the Israelites under the leadership of Moses that:

But shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee:... the Lord shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee until it has consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it. The Lord shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew, and they shall pursuer thee until thou perish, Deuteronomy 28:15, 21-22 KJV

When King David as leader sin against God; God punished his people by dearth because King David disobeyed God by counting the Israelites which was against the will of God. Dave agrees with the above statement by saying that:

In 2 Samuel 24, we find that King David decided to take a census of the men of fighting age. The prophet Gad was sent to David to announce God's displeasure with the taking of the census. The punishment for David's sin: the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from that morning until the appointed time, and seventy thousands of the people died. (2 Samuel 24:15). David makes a decision that does not please God, and God kills 70,000 Israelites for its, (2020).

God continued to punish those that disobeyed him in the time of Moses so that the world should know that He is the Lord and creator of all. Korah stood against the law of God through his servant Moses, to do what was against the will of God, and God reacted to Korah and those that joined him to rebelled against God through Moses, and this was what happened to them, "the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them along with Korah, whose followers died when the fire devoured the 250 men. And they served as a warning sign, Numbers 26:10.

COVID-19: A Curse from God

God is not happy with the lives the people are living under the universe. People have turned their minds on doing what is evil in all ramifications on the side of God. Every evil activity is in high increase: Gay-marriages, lesbianism,

trafficking, kidnapping, corruption, human sacrifices, wasting of human lives daily. All these evil activities irritate God to anger, and he places curses on humankind.

This is how COVID-19 must understand with the eyes of faith. It is God's judgment for sin to prompt our repentance. We would be mistaken to try and discern specific. Sins that prompted COVID-19 since God has not revealed that, but it would be more grievous to assume that the infliction of the coronavirus is occurring outside of God's providential work of redemption, with the prophet Joel, we must respond in lamentation and repentance of our sin. Assured by Christ, we should be comforted that in repenting of our sins, and turning to him in faith, we will not suffer those without hope, Cameron, (2020).

In the Old Testament time, God's anger descended in the whole world and caused an unprecedented flood that had not repeated itself. These were because men and women went into (i) intermarriage of godly Sethites and ungodly Cainites

(ii) Polygamous marriage of ancient dynastic rulers ('mighty men'); (iii) intermarriages of the 'daughters of men', i.e., women in the flesh, with the bene` Elohim, 'sons of God' i.e., angels, Gary, (1998,p.37).

The Egyptians marginalized the Israelites in Egypt because of their populations, several intimidations, hard labours, denials of works materials, no food in the workplace, killings, of their male children in hospitals and clinics, unnecessary sufferings of various degrees were imposed on them. The Israelites' were left with no option but to call for God's divine intervention on their site, and to free them from the burden of Egyptians. God saw the mistreatment, and his anger aroused, and he rained down ten plagues on their land. The punishment was for the Egyptians to know that God was behind the plagues, and to stop the evil been done to the Israelites', Gary, (1998, pp.73-74). Laurence agrees that because the Egyptians mistreated the Israelites, God brought on them a devastating series of miraculous plagues: of Frogs, of Gnats, of Flies, of Anthrax, of Boils, of Hail, of Locusts, of darkness, and ultimately God announces that on one terrible night He will bring death to the first-born in every Egyptians home, (2002, p.58).

The corruption of humanity can cost God to punish the whole world. Laurence agrees with Gary that the corruptions of human civilizations became so great that God resolved on cataclysmic judgment: the flood which wiped out all human life except for righteous Noah and his family, serves as a powerful statement of God's commitment to judge sin in history's end. The preservation of

Noah and his family is an equally powerful statement of God's commitment to saving those who respond to him in obedient faith, (2002, p.29).

Just like the Old Testament time when people engaged in activities that brought down God's anger, the present world still practices things that will bring down God's anger, practices like terrorism, money laundering, forgery, police brutality and hostility, embezzlement, ballot box-snatching, religious crises, criminal conspiracy, bribery and corruption, highway robbery/Armed robbery/robbery, cybercrime, rape, economic crime, financial crime, advance fee fraud, examination malpractice, physical assault. The legalization of gay marriage which is men to men, and women to women is against God's institution of marriage in Genesis 2:18-24. These and many more hidden activities practiced by human beings worldwide can make God curse the world with COVID-19. However, the Lord knows those that are his own.

Solutions to the Pandemic (COVID-19) From the Church

The Church: The Church, as described in the dictionary, is commonly used to refer to "the Christian religion body." But for that matter, it's people who make up the church, or the aforementioned organization. And the church (ekklesia in Greek) also refers to a people "called out" (ek kalein) etymologically indeed. The church is thus used in this work to refer to God's "people" in Christ, whether as a group or body, becoming the institution, or as individuals representing the "institution" or body. So, whenever the church is mentioned for specific roles or duties, the individual Christians are also involved or even meant to be involved. For an easy understanding and free flow of thought, some of the keywords used in this research work are defined as follows: Nevertheless, the word ekkle'sia is used by every legislature, and the term is used in the GK. Language no longer impels; for example, the city meeting or "assembly"(ekkle'sia) at Ephesus (Acts 19:39), and Israel called out of Egypt and spoken of as an ekkle'sia" congregation "in the wilderness (Acts 7:38), but in no sense was it a New Testament Church except as a type of what was to come. Besides the Church as the Body of Christ, in the New Testament, we find other meanings attached to the word. It sometimes refers to the company of the faithful in a single province or city (cf. Rev. 2-3), or those in a particular place of worship. It is even applied to bodies of professed believers who have largely departed from the truth of faith and practice, although in such cases the title is no longer appropriate except as a reminder of what they once were or professed to be, or merely as a convenient designation who's meaning in such cases is completely lost (Unger, 1988:236).

As a “called out” it means believers in Christ are people that God is looking on when it comes to justice and faithfulness to one another. We are expected to obey God in all that he wants us to do. The whole human race is expected to: love one another, protect one another, care for one another, and shun corruption, murder, kidnapping, injustice, terrorism, and all manner of evils. The Bible unveils that, if we will not obey the voice of the Lord our God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that He commands us to do, then all these curses, shall come upon and overtake us. The Lord will send on us curses, confusion, and frustration in all that we undertake to do until we are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of our deeds because we have forsaken him. The Lord will make the pestilence stick to us until it has consumed us off the land that we are entering to take possession of it. The Lord will strike us with wasting disease and with fever, inflammation, and fiery heat, and with blight and with mildew. They shall pursue us until we perish (Deuteronomy 28:15; 20-22 ESV).

God also revealed these curses to King Solomon in one of his nights and said to him: “I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifices. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, an command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land, (2Chronicles 7:12-14, ESV). The people who are called by the name of the Lord are the Church. It is only the Church that will call upon the Lord to stop the further spread of COVID-19.

The Church as the called out body of Christ is the only one that God gave the power to unlock heaven in time like this. That when heaven looks, and God’s anger is raining on the human race, only the Church can proffer solution to those pandemics. Shodeinde, (2020), described Churches as spiritual worship centers, where angels of God visit from time to time, to convey people’s problems to God for a solution. He holds that only prayers can solve the problems of COVID-19. The Church has the authority from God to stop the spread of COVID-19 because the Church represents Christ here on earth.

Adeboye has declared that the COVID-19 pandemic is part of God’s plan; a test of faith in which the power of prayer will shelter true believers from the virus. Portrayed as part of a divine unfolding rather than an unforeseen tragedy, Adeboye has been able to frame the pandemic as a divine wake-up call, Borgvin, (2020). The God of the Church is a prayer-answering God; he answered prayers

for the people of the past, present, and future. Ebola was one of the pandemics that was flooded out of Africa and other countries by prayers from Churches in Africa and beyond. Therefore, COVID-19 will soon follow the same prayers series.

The unbelievers may wonder that the Church which is the called out, the body of Christ was for the first time restricted or suspended services. The decisions taken in this regard make them go against their traditions because the gathering of the whole congregation at joint services, if not every day, then at least on Sunday, is the essence of Christianity. Their question may be where, and how will they gather to pray for God's interventions on humanities, Lukasz, (2020). During the restrictions and suspensions, Churches find new ways of reaching out to congregations, and the most vulnerable. In many cases, Churches expanded existing worship to online networks or established new services online using different forms of social media, websites, TV, and radio, Several Churches reported the positive effects of going online as an opportunity for creativity and the ability to reach an audience outside of the usual physical gathering, Geneva, (2020).

The power and authorities of the Church as the called out one cannot be restricted or suspended by human beings. Jerry who holds Calvin's view of the Church reveals that the need for Church can't be disputed theologically. Calvin holds a high view of the Church as the ecclesia, the called out people of God. He speaks of visible Church as the "external means or aid by which God invites us into the society of Christ and holds us therein' while both pictures of the Church are crucial, his main concern is with the visible Church: its marks, authority, ministry, and organization, (2020). Since the Church is the called-out ones, the Church and churches as the bodies, have solutions to the COVID-19. This was the power of the Church that Jesus led on Apostle Peter:

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Matthew, 16:18-19.

With this authority that is handed to the Church by Christ himself, the world should not see COVID-19 as the virus that will kill everyone without a solution, vaccine is not the solution to the pandemic, anyone that is vaccinated can still have contact with the pandemic, this tells the world that, Vaccine cannot bring lasting solutions to the pandemic. The only thing that brings a lasting solution to

the pandemic is prayers. This is because the COVID-19 pandemic emanated as a result of human sins that brought down God's anger on humanity.

Recommendations

The researchers analyzed the curses of God's punishments in the Old Testament and New Testament in line with COVID-19, and gave the following recommendations:

- COVID-19 is a punishment from God; therefore, the Church is the only solution to curing the pandemic through persistent prayers.
- Government at all levels; countries and regions should not interfere with Church activities when it comes to COVID-19 issues'.
- COVID-19 is a punishment from God; therefore, the government should not force a vaccine on people, because God's punishment cannot be cured by a vaccine.

Conclusion

The covid-19 pandemic has been a serious issue the world over; thousands of good and bad people have lost their lives because of this virus. Many countries are passing through economic meltdown as a result of the pandemic since 2019 to date. Many workers lost their jobs, and their families are now suffering from abject poverty because of the virus. The government at all levels did their best in controlling the virus, but uncountable human lives went into their untimely graves. This became a history that human beings will hardly forget.

Finally, the Church should wake up from their spiritual sleep, because God's anger is pouring upon the earth for iniquities the people of this world are committing on an hourly and daily basis. Therefore, God is only counting on your prayers, and my prayers to stop COVID-19 and heal our land for good developments, and prosperities.

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