

A Plague From God?

Text: 1 Kings 8:37-40

Thesis: Fears of an Ebola epidemic need to be tempered by information from God's word.

Introduction:

1. Chicken Little was convinced the sky was falling. As she ran about shouting her warning, others began to panic, too. In the end, it was only an acorn that had fallen on her head; her fears were totally unjustified. (Versions of this folk tale have been around for more than 25 centuries according to Wikipedia.)
2. The present fears over the Ebola virus are in a different class than a falling acorn, to be sure. Stories fill the news, and talk of its spread can be heard everywhere. Without doubt, fears are being fueled, and it's impossible to know just how bad this thing will become.
3. But even in the midst of the uncertainties of this problem, there are principles that should guide Christians. Let's spend a little time getting perspective from the Lord.

Discussion:

I. The Emerging Plague, And Others Before It

A. Some facts about Ebola:

1. According to an entry on the web site for Stanford University, Ebola hemorrhagic fever was first discovered in 1976 in Zaire and Sudan, Africa. It is named for the Ebola River in Zaire (present day Congo). The earliest incidents infected only a few hundred people, but the mortality rates were high, with one strain having a mortality rate of 88%. (<https://web.stanford.edu/group/virus/filo/history.html>)
2. The 2014 outbreak of the Ebola virus was first reported in March, and centered on the African nations of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. Since then, the number of infections have skyrocketed to (as of October 8), and a Liberian who had recently come from Africa has died in Dallas; two nurses who treated him have also contracted the illness. An article in the New York Times on October 14 has the headline: "New Ebola Cases May Soon Reach 10,000 A Week, Officials Predict".
3. Naturally, the growing number of cases - even if most are found far away - has sparked fear and panic among many. An article in the Washington Post (Oct. 15) noted: "As authorities disclosed that an infected nurse had taken a flight from Cleveland to Dallas one day before showing symptoms, Ebola moved closer to becoming the next great American panic ... Though Ebola's dangers are real and terrifying, epidemiologists and other authorities say that, for now, its greatest mark could be on the psyche of the country where other health threats are more perilous." Following that last statement, the article noted that there are more than 36,000 flu-related deaths in the U.S. each year.
4. There is certainly reason to be concerned about this Ebola outbreak. But perhaps the greater fear is how many may respond to Ebola. When fear grips us, we often do and say things we shouldn't.

B. Plagues that have preceded the Ebola virus:

1. For perspective's sake, we should remind ourselves that epidemics and pandemics are nothing new. Mankind has faced far worse situations before.
2. The Black Death (Bubonic Plague) struck in the mid-14th century. In four years time it took the lives of at least 75 million. That represents half the population of Europe; the total population of the world is thought to have been 450 million.

3. Other plagues have come - and gone. Among them are the Spanish Flu (1918), the modern AIDS crisis (which is now much more manageable than it once was), and other problems in our nation like smallpox, Polio, tuberculosis, etc.
- C. Looking back on past plagues we see that we eventually found ways to contain and even eradicate these dreadful diseases. But standing where we now stand, we need to hear again the words of President Franklin Roosevelt (1933 Inaugural Address): "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself--nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."

II. A Christian Perspective On The Ebola Epidemic

A. Is this plague from God?

1. Num. 16:46,49 - There are a number of times that destruction came from God in response to disobedience. Korah and his family died because of their rebellion, but after the earth swallowed them up a larger group accused Moses of killing good people. God responded with a plague that took the lives of 14,700.
2. There were other times that plagues are attributed to God's actions: the plagues upon Egypt; when the people made a golden calf after coming out of Egypt; when David took a census of Israel; etc. God certainly has the power (and the right) to send destruction when He sees fit.
3. But we also live in a fallen world where bad things naturally happen. Do we attribute every bad thing to God? Certainly not! Unless God tells us that this is a plague He has sent, let us refrain from labeling it that.

B. Principles to guide us during this frightful time:

1. Rev. 3:19 - **Let us respond as if God were disciplining us.** Though we don't have a direct message saying this is God's actions, it's always wise to look at ourselves and respond with humility and renewed dedication to doing God's will.
2. **Let ours be voices of encouragement:**
 - a. All around people are speaking gloomily of the future, and also speaking ill of government officials and those who are working hard to contain this problem.
 - b. Acts 27:20, 33-36 - A paralysis of fear had gripped all on board this ship caught in a ferocious storm. Paul spoke to encourage his fellow travelers, and convinced them to eat so they could remain strong.
 - c. Psa. 107:1,2 - This grand psalm teaches those who have been redeemed by the Lord to speak that message to others. Instead of joining in and spreading the gloom even further, let us point others to our best hope, the Lord Himself.
3. **Let us place this crisis before the Lord:**
 - a. 1 Kings 8:37-40 - In dedicating the temple, Solomon appealed to God to hear prayers that were offered in times of plague and sickness. No condition was placed on that request for the plague to be from God, but "whatever plague".
 - b. Phil. 4:6,7 - Instead of being "anxious", let us do as Paul instructs: take the source of our fears to God. We'll find a sense of peace we did not know before.
 - c. Phil. 4:4,5 - But note how Paul prefaced that command: Rejoice in the Lord "always", even in times of crisis or plague. Let us show our "reasonableness" to all (a word found 4 other times in the NT, all translated as "gentle"). We will not be like Chicken Little, encouraging panic and fear.

- C. Lk. 7:21 - When asked by John's disciples if He was the Christ, Jesus responded by healing many of "plagues". We can continue to show the power of our Lord by our responses to this modern-day crisis.

Conclusion:

1. According to the above-mentioned Washington Post article, “two-thirds of Americans are worried about an Ebola epidemic in the United States, and more than 4 in 10 are “very” or “somewhat worried” that they or a close family member might catch the virus.”
2. In the midst of fear, let us show our faith in the power of God above.

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