

## COVID-19 And Returning To Normal

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As the disruptions of the COVID-19 event drag on, we all just want to return to how things were. For a month or more, we've been hearing—if not saying—"I just want to get back to normal." We chafe at being told what we cannot do, and we have trouble adjusting to restrictions. And even as restrictions are being lifted in some places, in other areas, protest movements are fermenting. Many people have done the calculus, and concluded that what we have been told about the medical risks does not outweigh the economic and social risks of isolation. For many, an overwhelming urge has been building to return to at least some semblance of what life was like before COVID-19.

But God has given His people more to consider than just our personal measure of discomfort. For a moment, let's set aside the frustration over the restrictions, and remember some of what is "normal" in this nation. The overriding spirit of our times is that of humanism. Such worship of humanity and its works, ideas, and standards of good and evil, has produced scourges like abortion, homosexuality, and countless other ways of rejecting God. Evolutionary biology tries to deny God His primary role as Creator. Our economic system is based on globalism, greed, competition, and enslaving debt rather than God's providence. Our leaders are dishonest, and our educational systems prejudice the students against God. What passes for Christianity incorporates paganism, making the commandments of God of no effect by its traditions. *This* is what underlies "normal" America.

For decades, the church has been warning about iniquities that invite a painful response from the sovereign God. We have all agreed that it would take God's action for the nation to begin to consider its ways and for there to be hope for change. Yet if God does respond to the abominations by disrupting normalcy, what response might He be looking for in us? Do we want life to continue as it was if God is responsible for what is happening?

A billion or more people profess Christ, and yet they don't really believe Him. For example, the blessings and curses chapters of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are filled with God's promises, and He is faithful in carrying out each one, the pleasant and the painful, when the conditions are right. When there is obedience, God is faithful to what He said and blesses. When there is rebellion, God is likewise faithful, and He creates all manner of disruptions and calamities, just as He promised. But many don't believe He will do it.

If you would, please start turning to Deuteronomy 28. In last week's commentary, Martin read Deuteronomy 28:20 and 28, in which God promises to send cursing, confusion, madness, and blindness. As Martin said, the nation is in confusion because of all the conflicting reports and faulty reasoning.

God has done this before. Lamentations 2:1 says, "How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger!" A cloud obstructs vision, so only a portion of light can get through. Understanding is darkened, and nobody truly knows what is going on. Lies and rumors abound in this fog of war. We don't know the accuracy of the test kits, or whether there is a greater problem with false positives or false negatives. We don't know the true death count, or whether the reality could be much higher or much lower. The nation is in a cloud of confusion, and God says it is an effect of turning away from Him.

Today, we have media saturation to the point that we can find support for whatever narrative fits our existing worldview. Each man is confident he is correct and has the whole picture, and—like what God did at the Tower of Babel—it is the *other* guy who is speaking nonsense. God did that. What is intriguing, though, is that we can find *either* scenario for the severity of COVID-19 in God's promises. For example, in Leviticus 26:25, God promises that when the rebellious are gathered into cities, He will send pestilence among them. A pestilence is a contagious disease that is virulent and devastating. So, if you believe that COVID-19 is a devastating infectious disease and truly threatening, then you have God's word that He sends such things because of rebellion. He also says in Leviticus 26:16 that He will appoint wasting disease and fever, and fever is perhaps the foremost symptom of a viral infection. Fever is also mentioned twice here in verses 21-22:

**Deuteronomy 28:21-22** The LORD will make the plague cling to you until He has consumed you from the land which you are going to possess. The LORD will strike you with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with severe burning fever . . .

For this nation, COVID-19 joins other recent manifestations of pestilence and fever. We've dealt with swine flu, bird flu, West Nile virus, SARS, and MERS. In addition, each year the flu is another pestilence, one that varies each year in its severity. According to the CDC, during the 2017-2018 flu season, the flu killed between 46,000 and 95,000 people in the U.S. As another example, since the HIV/AIDS epidemic started back in the 80s, three quarters of a million people have died of it in the U.S. alone. This nation is no stranger to pestilence, and these examples do not include far worse epidemics in earlier times. God does not say *how* He will send the pestilences and fevers, only that *He will* send them.

On the other hand, if you believe that COVID-19 is more sound than fury—that there has been an epic overreaction to something akin to the seasonal flu, and that the nation has been hobbled by irrational fear—you can also find that in God's promises. Leviticus 26:36 foretells of a people so fearful that the sound of a shaken leaf causes them to flee, and it stems from God sending faintness or weakness into their hearts. So, whichever scenario you tend toward, God claims responsibility, but the result should be the same. Our national and individual response should not be to argue with those across the political aisle or the Internet connection, but to recognize God's hand and consider our own ways.

Verse 31 has another curse that is unfolding right now:

**Deuteronomy 28:31** Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat of it . . .

The literal fulfillment is that the livestock would be destroyed by enemies, so God's people would not receive the benefit. In principle, though, livestock is symbolic of wealth and livelihood—one's ability to make a living and become prosperous. With 30 million people unemployed (and counting), and with the government conjuring up trillions of dollars of fiat money—money that might ease some pain in the short term, but will cause further economic damage—we have a long way to go before the nation returns to prosperity.

But there is also a concrete application of this verse that is taking place with our food supply chain. Because of our service-based economy, most of us are removed from agriculture. For the sake of efficiency, most of our beef and poultry is sent to processing plants rather than sold directly to consumers. But because of reported outbreaks at the processing plants, the plants are hobbled and the

chain is breaking. The farmers cannot sell their meat, and the rest of us can't buy it. The CEO of Tyson's warned this week that the closure of plants means that "millions of pounds of meat will disappear from the supply chain." Millions of animals may simply be plowed under and buried alive. That's what this verse is describing—the livestock is there, but neither the farmer nor the nation can use it.

Now, look at verse 38:

**Deuteronomy 28:38** "You shall carry much seed out to the field but gather little in, for the locust shall consume it.

The concern today isn't locusts—at least not here—but this nation is experiencing sowing in vain. Because of the problems with the processing plants, farmers don't have anyone to sell to, so they are plowing under perfectly healthy crops. In addition, they are dumping milk, throwing out eggs, and killing chickens because it costs too much to care for them when the farmers can't sell the eggs. We are entering a time of scarcity, even though there is plenty. Our optimized supply chains are ironically keeping the food producers from being able to get the food to the consumers.

These curses, by God's design, disrupt normalcy. We can only push Him aside for so long before He reminds us how much we need Him. Even though the restrictions are being lifted, we should remember that the greatest threat is neither from a disease nor from the government's response to it, but from ignoring God, because He decides what befalls the nation. We can expect that as the nation rejects God, our quality of life will decline, because God is under no obligation to bless a nation that says it doesn't want or need Him.

Our human nature contains a quirk: Intellectually, we know life will be hard at times. None of us consciously expects a life where nothing goes wrong, yet often our subconscious operating belief is that we are owed simplicity and convenience at all times. Thus, when something disrupts our normalcy, we may become shocked, angry, frustrated, sad, even though we know it is to be expected. Job had a righteous approach as he asked, "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" But we who understand God's purpose and believe His promises are blessed in that we can put these challenges in a proper perspective. God has also given us the means to walk through these disruptions with Him rather than alone. That does not mean we will be totally unaffected. The Israelites experienced the first few plagues on Egypt. Perhaps God was helping them to want to be separated from the world from which He was delivering them. But regardless, this is a time to consider whether we want God to wake up the nation through disruptions, trusting Him to guide us through them, or whether we just want to return to business as usual.