

CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

P.O. Box 3490

McKinney, TX 75070-8189

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Dear Brethren,

I am sure you are having some of the same feelings that I am—what a surreal time this is! In less than a month, we have gone from holding our regular services in halls around the world, while making plans to get together for the Passover, the Night to Be Much Observed and the Days of Unleavened Bread, to the realization that we won't be together during these special days for possibly the first time since most of us came into the Church.

The whole world has been brought to its knees in less than a month as the COVID-19 virus has wreaked havoc on the entire world in a way that was not thought possible by most of us. There may be some who saw this coming, but I have to admit that I am not one of them. And that is one of the biggest lessons that we should all take away from this experience—the realization of how quickly things can happen in a world that is so interconnected. Prophecy isn't just something we read about in Scripture, but real events playing out in real life!

I am not suggesting that I know precisely where this event fits in prophecy, but I can tell you I have a much better picture of how quickly the prophecies of the Bible can be fulfilled. In the past we could look at events—such as the use of the atomic bomb in 1945, the development of the hydrogen bomb in the 1950s and the confrontations between the U.S. and Russia in hot spots around the world—and draw some conclusions about the fulfillment of prophecy. These all seemed to fit into the biblical model of massive destruction in the end time, though the majority of the world was largely unaffected by these events. Now, in a matter of weeks, this outbreak has connected the entire world in suffering in a way that comes right out of the book of Revelation.

We are all being assured that this virus will pass, that it will run its course. I believe that is true, but what will the world look like on the other side? That is my greatest concern, because it will mean tremendous suffering for people everywhere, and no doubt our brothers and sisters will be dramatically affected as well. The managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Kristalina Georgieva, essentially pushed the panic button this past week for the first time since the organization was founded in 1944. She announced that the IMF has \$1 trillion in a war chest to help nations of the world, but that it will not be nearly enough. Out of its 189 member nations, 90 have already requested emergency aid, and that number is growing daily. The economic impact of this one virus on the world will be gigantic. The impact on human life will likely be felt for decades, and the suffering and death will continue well beyond the life of the COVID-19 virus.

From the example of the first Passover—when the children of Israel in Egypt were affected by the early plagues and only spared from the latter plagues, including the death of the firstborn—we can see that there is precedent for God's people to be affected adversely by conditions around them. God took care of the Israelite slaves and brought them out of the land of Egypt, but He required that on the night of the Passover, each family spread blood over their doorposts and wait for God to pass over their homes and spare them. In a similar way we observe the Passover today to show our deliverance from sin through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. It is a sobering experience, but an exhilarating one when we understand the magnitude and effect of what happened when Jesus

Christ was crucified on a hillside outside of Jerusalem in A.D. 31 and then resurrected after three days and three nights.

Given the magnitude of current conditions, it is certainly a good time for us to observe the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, which picture forgiveness, mercy and deliverance. If there was ever a time when we (and the world) needed all three of these, it is now! Even though we can't all be together in person for this year's Passover, Night to Be Much Observed and Days of Unleavened Bread, I believe they will be the most meaningful and sobering observances in our modern history. Of course, how meaningful and how sobering will depend on each one of us.

It would be a mistake to approach this season in an attitude of "we've done this before" and not take it to heart for what it really means for us and the world in which we live (John 3:16-17). I do not believe that this is just "another Passover." I believe with all my heart that God is with us, whether we are huddled in our homes with just our families or meeting together in a congregation, as we have done for decades. The presence of God in our lives makes all the difference in the world.

This year I asked that everyone take a day to fast prior to the holy days. We must acknowledge that we need God in our lives. And we must be prepared to properly take the Passover. We cannot let another Passover go by without realizing how fragile and unprepared we are for the future; but with God's presence, we don't have to worry. Even if we lack the vision to see where these events fit in the fulfillment of prophecy, we will be okay if we keep our focus on God, His way of life and our love for one another. We don't have to fear or worry about the future as others do.

In the past three weeks I have been conducting a webcast meeting for our pastors and their wives around the world. We've had between 90 and 100 connections for each of these updates that give the events of that week. For the past two meetings, I have concluded with a scripture in 1 Corinthians. The church in Corinth was a very troubled and divided congregation. Paul corrected them strongly and admonished them to see the bigger picture of what they were part of instead of their own division and personal struggles. He admonished them to keep the Passover in a worthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:27-29) and to remove leaven from their lives (1 Corinthians 5:6-8), the sin that pulled them down. In his conclusion to this first letter, he encouraged them about the future. We find this in 1 Corinthians 16:13-14: "*Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love.*"

I believe these are the encouraging words we should take with us into the Passover this year. And please don't forget to pray for our brethren around the world! In southern and eastern Africa brethren are already experiencing food shortages; in the Philippines that country's president has issued a shoot-on-sight order for anyone violating the curfew laws; and in India 1.3 billion people are on lockdown. So far, our brethren are all safe, but that could change quickly.

I want to wish you a meaningful Passover, Night to Be Much Observed and Days of Unleavened Bread. We will be webcasting services from McKinney during this festival season. I look forward to speaking to all of you at that time.

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,


Jim Franks