

Conquering the Pandemic of Fear

***“I sought the LORD,
and he answered
me and delivered
me from all
my fears.”
—Psalm 34:4,
English Standard
Version***

THE WORD “PANDEMIC” IS not a term that has been often used in recent history. It is derived from the Greek *pan*, meaning “all,” and *demos*, meaning “people.” A pandemic is defined as a disease epidemic that has spread across

a large region, such as multiple continents, or worldwide. During the past century there have been a number of relatively small pandemics, but the last one of major worldwide significance, and in fact believed by many to be the deadliest of all known in history, was the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918. It infected an estimated 500 million people worldwide, resulting in estimated deaths ranging from 20 to 100 million, including some 675,000 Americans.

The previously sporadic use of the term pandemic came to an abrupt end on March 11 of this year, when the World Health Organization (WHO), declared COVID-19, also known as the Coronavirus, to be a worldwide pandemic. As of the latter part of

April, the time of this writing, worldwide cases are estimated at over 2.7 million, with more than 192,000 deaths reported. These numbers, of course, are changing daily and will undoubtedly be much higher in coming weeks.

Another “pandemic” of sorts which is beginning to affect the entire world as a result of COVID-19 is the economic impact associated with the shutdown of a majority of non-essential businesses and services. This has been deemed necessary in order to slow the spread of the Coronavirus until, it is hoped, this highly infectious disease runs its course and the numbers of new cases show a consistent decline. Governments and central banks around the world are currently pumping trillions of dollars into the economic infrastructure for the purpose of helping to keep businesses and individuals afloat until the longer-term financial aspect of this pandemic subsides.

There is yet a third “pandemic” associated with the current world situation—the pandemic of fear. It has been spreading due to the feelings of concern, uncertainty, and anxiety in the hearts and minds of much of the population. There are the concerns regarding the virus itself. Will I or any of my loved ones contract it? If so, what is the prospect for recovery? When will a vaccine be available? Then there is the economic uncertainty and anxiety. Will I be laid off from my job? Will I be able to continue paying my bills? Will I have the ability to feed my family? These, and a host of other questions and concerns, are going through the minds of many among mankind.

As members of the general population, we have little, if any, individual control over the health aspect

of the pandemic, with the important exception that we follow all the recommended guidelines associated with the prevention of the virus' spread. We also most likely have little control over the economic side of the pandemic, except that we should manage as carefully as possible the supplying of the necessities of life to ourselves and our families.

The pandemic of fear, however, we can attack and conquer, not by our own strength nor by fleshly wisdom, but by claiming the assurances and promises in the Bible, provided to those who put their implicit faith in God. Throughout the Scriptures, in both the Old and New Testament, are found a multitude of fear-conquering promises and inspirational assurances. The Book of Psalms, in particular, is a treasure trove of such promises to those who put their trust in God. In the subsequent pages of our lesson, we will look at three passages from the Psalms. We desire that these might be spiritually strengthening to us as we look to the Lord for our comfort and peace.

PSALM 34:3-8

“Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together! I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!”—*English Standard Version*

In this psalm, David states that one of the reasons we should exalt the name of the Lord is the fact that he delivers us from all our fears. How appropriate, as here stated, that all who love God and have faith in his promises should magnify him, for certainly there is none of us who has not been delivered from one sort of fear or another. The Apostle John declares that “fear hath torment.” (I John 4:18) Fear enslaves, as a heavy chain, rendering one powerless to do that which he would otherwise desire. There can be little peace or joy in the heart that is filled with fear.

“Those who look to him are radiant,” David continues, “and their faces shall never be ashamed.” The force of the expression, “Those who look to him” is strengthened by contrasting it with the idea of looking within to our own sources of strength, or of looking to the world around us in the hope of being delivered from our fears.

There is little point in looking to self, for we are too weak. If we have a proper estimate of our own strength we will tremble when we think of self. However, when we look to the Lord, we are strong in his power. How correct is the admonition, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” (Eph. 6:10) In another place, the Apostle Paul said concerning his own experiences, “When I am weak,” according to the flesh, “then am I strong,” in the Lord. (II Cor. 12:10) Indeed, it is in God’s strength, and not our own, that we can overcome fear.

Looking to the world around us is likewise insufficient in combatting our fears, as we note the confusion, uncertainty and perplexity that is everywhere apparent. The pandemic of fear gripping the masses

of people and nations today is further exacerbated by the fact that there are some who appear to promote and foster its hold on society, rather than attempting to give any message of hope or encouragement. If we look to the Lord, however, and to his Word, we shall find a source of hope and comfort in which, as David states, we “shall never be ashamed,” nor disappointed. The Apostle Paul writes that we have a hope that “maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.”—Rom. 5:5

The psalmist speaks of a “poor man” who cried unto the Lord, and tells us that he was saved out of his troubles. We might think of a poor man as one who has great need of help, and who, additionally, humbly realizes his need. Jesus speaks of those who are “poor in spirit,” and it is to these that the Lord gives his strength and blessing. (Matt. 5:3) One could be very poor along material lines, yet be proud in spirit and haughty. Those who are in this attitude do not enjoy the sunshine of God’s favor and blessing. On the contrary, all who are humble-minded, regardless whether they are rich or poor in material things, are in a proper attitude to receive the Lord’s mercy and loving-kindness.

“The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear [reverence] him, and delivers them,” writes David. Jesus, speaking of those who truly reverence the Lord, said, “Their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 18:10) The Apostle Paul, speaking of the holy angels, wrote, “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb. 1:14) From these texts it seems altogether likely that each one of the Lord’s fully devoted people

is under the special care of one or more of the holy angels.

The angel of the Lord “encamps” round about us. It is not an intermittent care which is exercised, but a constant vigilance. Such heavenly messengers watch over us every minute of the day and night. They do not prevent us from having trials which are good for our spiritual growth and development. Rather, they help to ensure that nothing befalls us except that which will contribute to our development in the character likeness of Christ Jesus, and hence, will be the best for our eternal welfare.

We should not limit this promise only to the care exercised over us by spirit beings. The term, angel, as used in the Scriptures, signifies “messenger,” and is broad enough in meaning to include any and every agency which God may use for our blessing. Even inanimate things, or the circumstances of life, may be utilized by him as messengers for our good. Indeed, we have the promise that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”—Rom. 8:28

“Taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.” David seemed to realize that not all, even of Israel, had really discovered the goodness of the Lord, so he extends an invitation to “taste and see.” This is, of course, symbolic language. It means that we should place ourselves in the position of trust wherein we can experience the Lord’s care over us. That place, or position, David describes in another psalm, is “the secret place of the most High.” (Ps. 91:1) Only those who humbly make their abode in “the secret place” of God’s care are in a position to know by experience,

to “taste” and to “see” his goodness. Blessed indeed are those who thus take refuge in him.

PSALM 37:3-6

“Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.”

Although these words of David certainly apply to those striving at the present time to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, they also will have a grand future fulfillment respecting the blessings to come to “all the nations of the earth.” (Gen. 22:18) The psalmist’s declaration is but one of many promises contained in the Old Testament, as well as in the New, which will have their ultimate accomplishment in God’s dealing with mankind during his kingdom, soon to be established upon the earth. Jesus taught us to pray for that time, saying, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth.”—Matt. 6:10

David said, “Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.” It would seem correct to say that the first application of this promise was to natural Israel, and that the “land” referred to was the land the Lord gave to them in which to dwell as a nation. (Deut. 11:31) However, there will be a larger fulfillment of this promise during God’s kingdom, under the righteous rulership of Christ. (Rev. 20:6) Then, all who trust in the Lord and do good will

dwell in the land—the earth. Later in this same psalm, David states in this regard, “The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever.”—Ps. 37:29

Returning to verse 4: “Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” The “desire of all nations shall come,” writes another prophet. (Hag. 2:7) It is true, of course, that the Lord gives to those who at the present time are striving to serve him, the desires of their hearts, to the extent they are in harmony with his purposes for their greatest spiritual benefit. However, in our text the main application seems to be the legitimate earthly desires of the world of mankind during the time when they are being restored to human perfection under the kingdom reign of Christ.

In order to participate in the blessings under the kingdom arrangement the people will have to devote themselves to the doing of God’s will. Hence, David’s further admonition, “Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him.” No one will obtain everlasting life upon any other basis than that of committing his way wholly to the Lord in the spirit of full dedication, and by trusting in his all-wise guidance and instruction. Those who take these steps during the coming kingdom of righteousness will discover that God will indeed “bring it to pass,”—that is to say, he will grant them the desires of their hearts.

Their righteousness shall be brought forth “as the light,” David continues. This thought seems to be in contrast to the experiences of God’s people during this present age of sin, suffering and death. Now the godly are often persecuted, and according to the standards of this world, their conduct is

often unappreciated and ridiculed. While they let their light shine, it is not understood by a majority of the people. However, it will be different in the coming kingdom of Christ. Then the righteousness of those who commit their way unto the Lord shall shine brightly. It will be seen, appreciated and respected by all who are similarly walking on the “highway” that leads to holiness.—Isa. 35:8

PSALM 46:1-3

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.”—ESV

This is another reassuring psalm of trust, and one that has a special application at this particular time, when the institutions of this present age are being shaken, in preparation for God’s kingdom of righteousness, a new age, soon to be established for the blessing of all the families of the earth. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble,” writes the psalmist, and the verses which follow clearly indicate that the “trouble” referred to is the same as that which the Prophet Daniel describes as a “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.”—Dan. 12:1

It is true, of course, that the Lord is a “very present help” to his people in all their troubles. He guides, strengthens and comforts them in their every time of need. He allays their fears, and leads them in times of uncertainty. During this period, especially, everything is being shaken that can be shaken.

(Heb. 12:26,27) Those striving to maintain their faith and trust in the Lord are in special need of his protection and care, and this psalm promises to them that this need will be supplied.

It is because this is true that the words of the next verse are so appropriate: “Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea.” This is highly symbolic language, and is descriptive of the removal of this “present evil world,” which is under the rulership of Satan, the “god of this world.” (Gal. 1:4; II Cor. 4:4) Jesus foretold of the trouble incidental to this in similar language. He said that there would be upon the earth “distress [Greek: holding fast together] of nations, with perplexity [Greek: no way out],” and that men’s hearts would be “failing them for fear,” as they looked at the things coming upon the earth. Jesus also illustrated this time of distress and fear by the symbol of the “sea and the waves roaring.”—Luke 21:25,26

At the present time, a majority of the world of mankind, not knowing the meaning of current events, and having no assurance of a happy outcome, are filled with fear. If, however, we have faith and trust in God, and in the soon establishment of his kingdom of righteousness here upon the earth, “we will not fear.” Instead of fearing, our hearts rejoice—not because of the trouble—but because we know from the promises of God’s Word that this time of shaking and great distress will soon accomplish God’s divine purpose. Then will be ushered in an age during which all the suffering of mankind will be eliminated. “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor

crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” Then the tabernacle of God, his dwelling place, will be “with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”—Rev. 21:3,4

Although we do not know with any degree of certainty, the current Coronavirus pandemic will likely continue at least through the early summer, and the resulting economic pandemic will last significantly longer. However, if we put our full faith and trust in the Lord, his ways, his will and his plan, as laid out for us in the Scriptures, we can be free from the pandemic of fear. Thus, we can continually abide in the “secret place of the most High.” It is our sincere prayer that this may be so with all of us. ■