

# AIDS

## How a Killer Plague Can Be Stopped

by Melvin Rhodes

*The AIDS epidemic, increasingly compared to the dreaded black death of the 1300s, has taken millions of lives and promises to take millions more. Yet, tragically, we ignore the only real solution to this deadly plague.*

**T**he facts about AIDS are overwhelming. The disease is spreading rapidly from country to country. Morgues are working round the clock to keep up with the demand. Millions of orphans are left behind by their dead parents. Cemeteries are filled and overflowing. Coffin makers are running out of wood. Ignorance, superstition and fear abound. Governments are paralyzed by the sheer enormity of the death toll. Medical services are swamped and unable to cope.

And the problem is growing worse. Much worse.

We've seen the images on television and heard the news reports from countries devastated by AIDS. But they don't begin to do justice to the magnitude of the problem.

How bad is it? The president of one country in southern Africa told the recent international AIDS conference in Durban, South Africa, that in 10 years his country *will not exist*. With a third of its citizens infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), it's only a matter of time before virtually his entire country is wiped out by this modern plague.

This is not the first plague the world has experienced. Although the opening paragraph of this article describes the situation in Africa, it is also a vivid description of the black death, the plague that devastated many European countries in the middle of the 14th century. England's population was

six million when the plague arrived in 1348. By 1500 it had plummeted to 1.6 million. Because that decline occurred over seven generations, it involved far more than 4.4 million deaths. Depression, pessimism, a loss of faith in religious institutions, change in land tenure and major alterations in trade and commerce ensued as a result of the massive die-off.

Now we see a similar pattern threatening not just one but at least several nations. History has a way of repeating itself.

Remarkably, both the black death and AIDS *easily could have been prevented*. Measures that would have prevented the widespread suffering and death from both plagues were written down thousands of years ago—in the pages of the world’s best-selling book, the Bible.

### **The black death strikes**

In 1346 the Mongol army besieged the Genoese trading center at Caffa, now Feodosia, on the Crimean peninsula. The Mongols were forced to withdraw because of heavy losses. Their losses, surprisingly, were not attributable to fighting but to a mysterious and devastating malady that became known as the plague. The disease was spread by fleas that lived on the backs of the Asiatic black rat. When the rats died of plague, the fleas would find a new home—often the closest human being.

At the time no one knew how the deadly

disease was transmitted. They were in the dark as to its cause or how to prevent its spread.

The Mongols fled, but not before the disease had spread into the city of Caffa. From there it rode aboard ships through the Black Sea out into the Eastern Mediterranean and to Sicily, then on to the Italian mainland and the countries beyond.

Within two years it had reached England. Horrible, inexplicable deaths ensued within a year for about a fourth of the population. Commerce and travel slowed, then ground to a halt.

In the ignorance and superstition of the late Middle Ages, many people thought the disease was spread through the air. There was some logic in this assumption. The plague would arrive in a community suddenly and without warning, then depart a few days later as mysteriously as it had come, leaving death and a few stunned, shaken survivors in its wake.

To protect themselves from what they supposed was contaminated air, people would lock themselves in latrines and breathe the foul-smelling air into their lungs to keep from breathing the air outside.

Some people looked for scapegoats, blaming others for their misfortune and killing them by the thousands even as they sought to be spared from the deadly invader. Many grew suspicious of Jews, who to a large extent had gone unscathed by the plague.

Made scapegoats for the horrendous suffering, many Jews who had escaped the plague died at the hands of their neighbors. Ironically, plague victims could have learned much from the Jews that could have spared many of them from the disease. (Later we will consider in greater depth why Jews didn’t contract this disease in the same numbers as others.)

### **A preventable plague**

Perhaps this background helps us better understand the ignorance and superstition that contributes to the spread of AIDS in less-developed parts of the world.

The black death was a disease of filth. If people had followed simple biblical laws of hygiene, many could have avoided infection and death. But people didn’t make the connection. The plague finally came to an end only when the more-aggressive European brown rat drove out the plague-infested black rat.

Today’s plague, AIDS, is also a disease of filth—the filth of the mind that dominates contemporary culture and leads to rampant sexual immorality. Like the black death before it, the solution to the modern plague is revealed in Scriptures.

### **AIDS: A plague begins**

No one knows for sure how or when AIDS started. The many theories come down to the fact that the African green monkey carries the HIV naturally in its bloodstream. Somehow, several decades ago, the virus in the blood of the green monkey was transmitted to people, probably when hunters killed and butchered HIV-carrying monkeys or consumed meat from infected monkeys. Once in the human bloodstream,

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the virus proved to be a deadly killer.

It could have ended there, in the jungles of tropical Africa. But it didn't. Once the virus made the jump to man, it spread quickly around the world. Whereas trade in the Middle Ages was slow, modern transportation is fast. The result was that people all over the world were dying from AIDS before the disease even had a name.

In fact, the name reflects the mystery and sudden urgency of the disease. AIDS is an acronym for *acquired immunodeficiency syndrome*, reflecting the reality of a disease that came from nowhere and resulted in the deaths of thousands of people whose immune systems suddenly failed to work. Death itself for AIDS victims is attributed to various causes, but they all come back to the fact that the immune system has failed to act normally.

In the United States the problem was first seen among homosexuals. It was soon established that certain homosexual practices were particularly effective means of spreading the disease.

However, it would be wrong to describe the disease as only a "gay plague." Well more than half the people with AIDS are in Africa, where it is a heterosexually transmitted disease.

For many years it was thought that education would help stop the spread of AIDS. The experts advised people not to practice "unprotected sex" and that if they used condoms they would reduce the risk of contamination. In the last few years, however, people have been increasingly inclined not to bother protecting themselves because new drugs have become available that help those infected with HIV live longer.

However, it is important to understand that *these drugs are not a cure*. They can only delay and alleviate the symptoms, and some have severe side effects. The sad fact remains that *there is no cure*; there are only steps we can take to prevent the disease from spreading in the hope that science can find a cure or that it may eventually die out.

### God's definition of high risk

Some reports on the recent AIDS conference in Africa noted that people in "high-risk groups" were engaging in unprotected sex again. Of itself that is not surprising. Shocking is how "high-risk" was defined—as having sex with *six or more partners per year*.

Six or more partners per year? The Bible defines "high risk" as having *any* partners, even one, outside of marriage—either before or after committing to a partner for life.

Statements like this show us just how far man has drifted from God. They also illustrate that man cannot find a solution to the AIDS problem without God.

Three thousand years ago King Solomon wrote: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). His inspired proverbs were intended "to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion" (verse 4).

Solomon, like millions today, was not inexperienced in sexual matters. He had "seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines" (1 Kings 11:3). Toward the end of his life his mistakes led him to conclude: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). We would do well to heed Solomon's words.

### A plague of broken laws

When we get to the root of the problem, we find that AIDS is the natural consequence of breaking God's laws. When HIV infections first jumped from monkeys to man, they could not have spread like they did, and taken millions of lives, without the gross immorality that brought the worldwide plague we see today.

At the beginning, when God created the first man and woman, He knew they needed instruction. They did not know right from wrong. They could not learn everything themselves. In Genesis 2:16-17 we find God instructing Adam on what he could eat and what he should avoid eating.

Later in the same chapter we read that God created Eve as a companion for Adam. We then find words that were intended for future generations. They talked of the cycle of life as it was to be: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (verse 24).

Here God instituted marriage. The marriage covenant between a husband and wife is not a humanly devised arrangement. It goes back to God in the Garden of Eden. Succeeding generations were to follow this instruction. The institution of marriage did not pertain only to Adam and Eve.

A man and woman were to "become one flesh" permanently. Only death was to have ended the relationship.

### Sexual laws revealed in the Bible

In the next chapter we find that Adam and

Eve disobeyed God. Men and women have been rejecting God's instructions and paying a high price for it ever since. Part of the price includes both AIDS and the black death—along with many other plagues throughout history that have devastated mankind.

Thousands of years later, when He brought the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, God revealed to them the foundation of His laws, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). Given time, they might have come up with some of them on their own, since almost everyone recognizes that such acts as murder and stealing are wrong.

But some of the laws He revealed they would not have realized on their own. They are *divine* laws given by a loving God to His people, laws that were intended to govern their nation for all time. God's revelation, above and beyond mere human intuition and understanding, was needed for the Israelites to learn to live happy and healthy lives.

### Why did God give His laws?

In the book of Leviticus we see God instructing the Israelites concerning which animals were suitable to eat. Without this instruction they could have eaten creatures that would have endangered their health.

As noted earlier, HIV apparently spread from animals to humans when African hunters killed monkeys for food and came in contact with their infected blood. Eating the flesh of monkeys and apes is forbidden in Leviticus 11, where God says: "Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch. They are unclean to you" (verse 8).

Leviticus gives many other laws that relate to health. Chapter 20 lists a series of laws governing sexual activity. These relate to adultery, incest, homosexual practices and other acts. Without instruction the people could have committed such acts in ignorance of the consequences until it was too late and the damage had been done.

On the surface some of these acts may seem harmless. But God repeatedly told Israel the laws He had given them were *for their good* (Deuteronomy 6:17-25; 10:12-13; 12:28; 28:1-15; 30:15-16). Many centuries would pass before medical researchers would demonstrate the benefits of these laws—that promiscuous relationships are the prime conduit for dozens of debilitating and fatal venereal diseases and that the offspring of sexual unions between close relatives are much more prone to have genetic defects and other physical and mental handicaps.

As with the forbidden fruit in Genesis

3:6, such acts might feel good. God had to clearly tell His people that sex—*any* sex—outside of the union between husband and wife was wrong. And it still is. God and His eternal law do not change (Malachi 3:6). Read the strong warning against immorality He gave to Israel in Leviticus 18:24-30. His laws still apply whether we choose to heed them or not.

Obedying the laws God gave regarding marriage and sex would mean AIDS would die out with our present generation. There would be no danger of repeating the experience of the black death, which affected Europe in wave after wave of indescribable suffering and countless fatalities for more

city and throwing refuse out of windows” proved ineffective (ibid.).

“Woe to those who join house to house . . . till there is no place where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land,” warned the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 5:8).

Houses in medieval towns were so close together that they were a major health hazard, allowing rapid spread of disease. The practice of not burying waste matter was another contributing factor. Rats thrived in such conditions.

In Deuteronomy 23:12-13 God had instructed the Israelites to deposit human waste outside their living areas, being careful to bury it. Not until recent centuries did

25:10), which would have ended the oppressive feudal system and returned land to its original owners for the benefit of all.

### Biblical laws: Arbitrary or for all time?

Does this all sound too simple? That’s only because man has had to devise convoluted responses to deal with the effects of his actions rather than dealing with the *original cause*. God’s ancient answers to our modern, seemingly complex problems are straightforward—with the added benefit that they do not require massive budgets, bureaucracies and government intervention. God’s solutions deal with underlying behaviors that *create* the problems in the first place.

The AIDS crisis threatens to virtually wipe out several African nations within the next two decades. Other countries will likely follow.

In the prosperous Western world the problem will require increasing amounts of money, raised by higher taxes and ever-increasing insurance premiums, as more and more people grow sick and succumb to the disease. A medical cure remains elusive, made difficult by constant mutations of the virus. No matter how much money is spent on research, no one can guarantee that science can find a cure or develop a successful vaccine. AIDS remains an always-fatal disease.

The only solution that *will* work for certain is prescribed in the Bible. It’s time for people to hear that the solution is already known and that the only way forward is for people to obey the moral laws of God He revealed thousands of years ago. **GN**

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*The AIDS quilt, here on display in Washington, D.C., bears the names of more than 80,000 AIDS victims. The 50-ton traveling memorial is a sobering reminder of the deadly epidemic.*

than 300 years. In England it wasn’t until the Great Fire of London in 1666 that the plague ended—more than 300 years after it began.

### Laws governing hygiene and health

The Bible shows how that plague, too, could have been avoided. Then, as now, most people were not familiar with the Word of God and did not live by it.

“Dirt and malnutrition were the two great allies of the plague,” wrote Philip Ziegler in *The Black Death* (1971, p. 57). “. . . The state of public hygiene was deplorable. Constantly reiterated laws against rearing pigs and goats in the street, tanning skins in mid-

scientists learn that many diseases are spread through contact with human waste—yet God had revealed this preventive measure some 3,500 years ago. Jews who obeyed these godly instructions during the time of the black plague were not affected in the same way as others. Their obedience to God gave them a degree of immunity in a way no one at the time understood.

Malnutrition was yet another problem in the Middle Ages, caused in part by the inequitable distribution of land. But this problem, too, could have been resolved by the introduction of the biblical Jubilee, the year of liberation in ancient Israel (Leviticus

### Recommended Reading

Why did God reveal the laws found in the Bible? Are they simply an arbitrary list of dos and don’ts given on a whim? Are they designed to keep us from having any fun? Do they apply in our modern world? The answers to these questions affect your life every day, regardless of whether you realize it or not. Be sure to read *The Ten Commandments*, our 80-

page guidebook to the fundamental principles of God’s laws. It’s free from any of our offices listed on page 2, or you can access it on our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org](http://www.gnmagazine.org).



# 10 Million AIDS Orphans: *A Disaster for Africa*

*AIDS has taken a horrible toll, and the plague is far from over. What will stop the horror?*

by Mario Seiglie

**M**ore than 10 million orphans. It took a while for the headline in *Newsweek* magazine to sink in. More than 10 million African children have lost one or both parents because of the AIDS plague. “A full-blown crisis is upon us, and it’s worse than expected,” reported *Newsweek*. “By the end of this year an astonishing 10.4 million African children under 15 will have lost their mothers or both parents to AIDS—90 percent of the global total of AIDS orphans” (Jan. 17, 2000, p. 12).

Now, as the year draws to a close, estimates of the number of AIDS orphans run as high as 13.5 million. They are expected to grow to a staggering 44 million over the next decade—children who have grown up with virtually no social structure, guaranteeing a future wave of lawlessness and chaos in already devastated countries. In some countries fully half of teenagers and young adults are infected and will die of the disease.

In any other part of the world the news would be scandalous, but in Africa, a continent largely disconnected from the rest of the planet, AIDS is still mostly a silent epidemic. The cover of the Sept. 9 issue of *World* said, simply and starkly, “AIDS: Africa Is Dying Slowly.”

At least it has been finally recognized for what it is—a worldwide plague. The facts are slowly sinking in about how terrible and widespread this plague has become. It has already killed close to half a million Americans, almost 10 times the number who died in the Vietnam War. No nation is immune. China and India, where the epidemic is just beginning to break out, together already have more than seven million cases.

According to figures from the United Nations, with each passing minute 11

persons become infected with the AIDS virus, or 16,000 a day. This totals an appalling 5.6 million people stricken with the plague last year. The number of people who have AIDS worldwide is around 35 million. More than 23 million are infected in Africa alone (compared with 1.5 million in the United States).

How many have died from AIDS? A million? Five million? Ten million? No, it is far worse. UNAIDS, an umbrella group for United Nations agencies, estimates the figure at 19 million. Nearly four million of them have been children under age 15.

In 1999, 2.6 million died of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which is equivalent to the population of Jamaica. Perhaps because two million of those died in Africa (total AIDS deaths in Africa so far total 13.7 million), the wails of grief are seldom heard beyond the villages of the dead. Yet they are all people made in God’s image, but whose dreams and aspirations have been shattered in slow, lingering deaths.

The figures have grown to such astronomical proportions that they are finally causing worldwide alarm. “The spread of this disease,” said U.S. ambassador to the UN Richard Holbrooke, “could not be contained in Africa, and the destruction of Africa from AIDS will not be limited to the continent. If we don’t work with the Africans themselves to address these problems . . . we will have to deal with them later when they will get more dangerous and more expensive.”

## Factors that cause AIDS to spread

Why has the AIDS virus been particularly virulent in Africa? In Africa AIDS is primarily a heterosexual disease. Much of the spread is because of social structures and instability. Many migrant men leave their

rural homes and spend months working in mines, on construction projects or at jobs in the cities. While away from home, many visit prostitutes, of whom up to 90 percent in some areas carry the virus (in some cities, up to 50 percent of the population has AIDS). After becoming infected the men carry the virus back to their wives and others in their home villages.

Civil unrest and war have also played a part. Widespread numbers of rapes committed in some of Africa’s 14 ongoing military conflicts have also spread the disease. Even UN and regional peacekeeping troops have contributed to the problem, fathering illegitimate children and contracting the infection, which they carry to their own homelands and homes.

Cultural factors play a role. In some areas the superstition has spread that the best way for an HIV-infected man to be cured is to have sexual relations with a virgin.

## Politically correct reporting ignores causes

The caution with which some of the Western news media deal with the AIDS epidemic is mostly because of the political issues involved. Prostitution, promiscuity and homosexuality are all major causes for the spread of AIDS but are considered “politically incorrect” subjects by many journalists. In a world where sexual morals are being increasingly relaxed, it is difficult for the news media to deal with the main culprit of the AIDS outbreak—the breaking of the seventh of the Ten Commandments: “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14).

It’s revealing to note that, as one insightful *Newsweek* reader later commented about the special edition dedicated to AIDS mentioned earlier: “In 14 pages of text, the

words ‘casual sex’ or ‘promiscuity’ were not mentioned once, even though this is the direct or indirect cause of 98 percent of all new infections in Africa. Nor was the fact that HIV is a sexually transmitted infection alluded to.”

To be sure, many in Africa are innocent victims. Tainted blood used in transfusions is one cause. Lack of sterilization in hospitals and clinics contributes to its spread. Mates unknowingly contract AIDS from a spouse who is a carrier. Then there are the children who inherit it from birth from infected mothers.

### **A warning from God**

God has repeatedly warned mankind in the past that He will not tolerate rampant sexual immorality forever. We read that He turned “the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them *an example* to those who afterward would live ungodly . . .” (2 Peter 2:6, emphasis added throughout).

God’s prophesied intervention in world affairs is linked in Daniel 8 to growing degeneracy and an increase in ungodly practices and lifestyles, of which the AIDS plague is both a symptom and a part. It is prophesied: “And in the latter time of their kingdom, *when the transgressors have reached their fullness*, a king shall arise . . . against the Prince of princes [at Christ’s second coming]; but he shall be broken without

human means” (verses 23-25).

Like the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, it seems sin has to rise to a certain level in our time before God decides to initiate the prophesied intervention of His Kingdom.

### **A past plague**

So far the death toll from AIDS has not equaled that of plagues in the past. The 1918 influenza virus was estimated to have killed more than 20 million people. It spread quickly and then died out. But a real plague is known for its lasting deadliness. So far the AIDS epidemic has lasted some 20 years.

There are no known cures for AIDS. Expensive and powerful drugs can hold it somewhat in check—albeit with unpleasant side effects—but not eliminate it. Enormous efforts and resources have been directed at finding a cure, and some scientists believe they are on the right track to a lasting solution. This would be good news, for no one wants AIDS to continue, and there are too many innocent victims.

Fear of contracting HIV has slowed the rampant immorality in some countries. One wonders if a cure for AIDS would free people from their fears and actually lead to increased promiscuity. Other sexually transmissible diseases continue to multiply in spite of their devastating consequences.

### **Long-term solution to AIDS**

The long-term solution to the AIDS

problem includes more than eliminating the virus. People must choose to *stop the sexual misconduct* that spreads this killer disease.

There is good news for the future in the fight against AIDS. God promises that people will choose this solution under His government, which Christ will establish at His return to earth.

Jesus prophesied the dire world conditions before His promised return: “And because *lawlessness* will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 24:12-13). He also foretold that “pestilences [disease epidemics] . . . in various places” would be another sign before His coming (verse 7).

Today, as in the past, children suffer for the sins of their parents. Lamentations 5:1-7 recounts that, many centuries ago, some were orphaned because of their fathers’ sins. The misery brought by sin can spread its suffering and heartache over several generations (Exodus 34:7).

But Christ has promised He will return to save this sin-stricken world from itself. He will usher in a kingdom in which diseases such as AIDS will no longer exist, because the world’s inhabitants will choose a better way of life. We read about this in Isaiah 11:9: “For the earth shall be *full* of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” With true knowledge, people will not choose damaging, self-destructive lifestyles.

### **A change of heart**

For that to occur, though, man’s heart must be changed. God’s laws must be writ-

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# Orphans

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ten in a person's heart. God has prophesied this will occur: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: *I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts*; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Hebrews 8:10; compare Jeremiah 31:33).

Imagine a world in which marriage is respected to the point that no one looks for another sexual partner, where youths are not promiscuous and commit to wait until marriage to have sexual relations. AIDS and other venereal diseases will then be a distant memory.

God, who describes Himself as "a father of the fatherless" (Psalm 68:5), says that eventually He will wipe away the tears of those who respond to Him (Revelation 7:17; 21:4). These are some of God's promises, which He will bring about when Christ establishes His blessed Kingdom.

*The Good News* is committed to proclaiming the gospel of God's Kingdom and the marvelous truths that will eventually lead to the elimination of the world's plagues. Then and only then will the terms *AIDS* and *venereal disease* be only a part of man's history. **GN**

## Recommended Reading

Why did God give us the Ten Commandments? Some people think they're only a series of restrictive *don'ts* designed to keep us from having any fun or that they're



hopelessly obsolete in our modern world. But what does God say? Be sure to request your free copy of *The Ten Commandments* to discover the encouraging, exciting truth about these 10 eternal principles.

If you'd like to learn more about how the world will be transformed by obedience to God's laws, also request *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

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