

THE "LOCK DOWN"

Wherever you are, on any continent, you may well be suffering the restrictions of the "lock down" in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. I am writing this in the U.K., where the restrictions are expected to last for several weeks to come. Facing the confines of one's home with limited opportunity to leave the premises brings a number of challenges. Some of these challenges have been faced by others that we can read about in the Bible. What follows is an attempt to identify how others coped with conditions of 'lock down'.

But first let us turn to a situation when a group of people were facing an alarming threat.

I The Approaching Menace

It was in the final days of the conquest of Judah in 586 B.C. Nearly every city of Judah had fallen to the army of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Jeremiah 34 verse 6 tells us that only two fortified cities of Judah remained unconquered - Lachish and Azekah. Some letters written on pieces of pottery by soldiers manning an outpost (probably of Lachish), since unearthed by archaeologists, reveal something of the apprehension that must have been felt by the inhabitants of those cities. Here is what they wrote:

"We are watching for the signals of Lachish, according to all the indications which my lord has given, for we cannot see Azekah".

They had heard report of city after city falling to the Babylonian army. They had watched for signal fires from cities within their line of sight. Now there was an ominous silence from Azekah. It would not take a skilled strategist to realise that Lachish – and those appointed to watch over it – would be next!

Similar feelings of foreboding embraced us in the UK as we saw Covid-19 advancing to our shores - first China, then other countries of Asia, then Europe then us! Perhaps you have felt that too, as it approached your nation and town.

Jeremiah used the imminent threat of loss of freedom to remind those left in Judah of their failure to meet all of their covenant obligations, in particular failure to free their slaves (Jeremiah 34:7-22). How about using this temporary loss of some of your freedoms to reflect on any promises you made to the Lord, perhaps many years ago, that you have neglected to fulfil?

II The Apostle Paul

Paul is the prime example of a New Testament character prohibited from travel. In his case this was not his own home in Tarsus, but where he was held under house arrest, first in Ephesus and later in Rome. We are not told how long he had to endure these lock-downs, but undoubtedly they would have been long enough for the deprivation of freedom to dampen his spirit, had he allowed it to do so. For a man with such an energetic and active ministry he might well have

felt his work usefulness for the work of Christ's Kingdom had come to an end. But we owe to Paul to have given us five of the New Testament Books – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Timothy and Philemon during his captivity. Additionally, Paul seems to have utilised his time in further reading and study – perhaps catching up on reading that his busy life-style had previously prevented him from doing, for when writing to Timothy he asked for him to send “the books, especially the parchments” (2 Timothy 4:13).

Maybe you too are having to step aside for a while from what is normally a busy – even hectic – ministry. God can still use you. Like Paul, you can write letters to encourage and help those you cannot get to see. Unlike Paul, you can send them emails, texts, speak to them on the phone, communicate on social media. And how about catching up on reading and study that you have long wanted to do when you were so busy. Ideas for [Short Studies](#) are available on this website, or you can order one of our free [Study Guides](#) for more intensive studies.

III Four Lepers

Lepers were isolated in ancient Israel for the same reason as Coronavirus victims are required to be in isolation – to stop the spread of the disease (though we now know that it takes prolonged exposure to catch leprosy). In 2 Kings 7:3-13 we learn of four lepers, isolated from the citizens of Samaria, who saved the city from starvation. The city was under siege by Syrian forces, who had camped outside its walls to confine the inhabitants until they either surrendered or died from starvation. The lepers, forced to be outside the city walls, found out that the Syrian soldiers had deserted the camp, leaving ample supplies of food and horses for the taking. Thus the lepers, who usually could contribute little or nothing to the benefit of those in the city, were able to share the good news of starvation being diverted.

Maybe you feel you can do nothing for others while you are shut up at home. Think and pray about what you *can* do, albeit whilst keeping your social distance. You might bring words of encouragement or comfort through the means suggested in Point II above. Maybe you have the facility of electronically transferring money to a food bank, or if you are able to get out safely for short periods, get shopping for those more firmly shut in.

IV Paul and Silas

Paul and Silas had been thrown into jail in Philippi. 1st Century jails would not have been the most pleasurable place to be confined. Their comfort will have been absent, their ministry brought to a halt, their lives in jeopardy. Enough to make them complain bitterly and resent their treatment by the authorities. But at midnight they were found, not moaning, but “praying and singing hymns to God”.

May we ‘shut-ins’ be found praising rather complaining. Maybe, in as much as we are in contact with the outside world, our cheerful spirits will be an inspiration to others, as was the witness of Paul and Silas to their fellow prisoners.

Conclusion

This article has been somewhat different to the usual monthly short study suggestions. But you can still do a bit of your own study on the subject. How about looking at the life of Samson, who found strength from God when shut up in a Philistine prison (Judges 16:28-30); or the Israelites, shut up in the region of Goshen in Egypt, whose release came by the hand of God (Exodus 7-12); or Rahab, who may have been shut up with her fellow citizens behind the walls of Jericho for fear of the Israelites camped outside (Joshua 2:8-11).

Just, perhaps, what seems now to be a time of frustration and boredom, will turn out to be a blessing that will enhance your life and that of others. Enjoy your confinement.