

The Terror & Reality Of

Ebola Hits Home

News flash! Ebola has arrived in New York! Zman goes in depth to the root of the issue, covering not just the facts but the raw, terrifying emotions associated with the story that has dominated the headlines and is not going away.

Some have called it a plague of biblical proportions. Its victims die indescribably horrible deaths, and can transmit the shockingly fast-moving virus to others before they or their victims know. It is fatal as much as 90% of the time and there is no cure.

Ebola—the name alone evokes fear. It is devastating Africa, and now has come to the United States. But it is not the first time here. Just over two decades ago, a strain broke out in the middle of a Washington DC suburb, not far from the White House, yet authorities hid the true danger from the public even as they realized that the threat was spiraling out of their control. Read about that terrifying outbreak and its relevance to today's headlines, suggesting that even the best medical science in the greatest technological civilization the world has ever known may not be enough to stop the unthinkable...



Yaakov Astor

“Horror” is the best word to describe death at the hands of the Ebola virus. Richard Preston, in *The Hot Zone*, his terrifying true account of an outbreak of the disease on American soil 25 years ago, describes one of its victims like this:

[On January 1, 1980, Charles Monet went exploring Kitum Cave in Mount Elgon National Park, Kenya, host at night to herds of elephants looking for the salt they can ferret out of its rocks, which they pulverize with their tusks. Monet and a friend spent the entire day exploring this huge, mysterious opening in the earth, home to bats, rats, and various other animals and insects.]

On the seventh day after his visit to Kitum Cave, Monet felt a throbbing pain behind his eyeballs. He decided to stay home from work and went to bed in his bungalow. The headache grew worse. His eyeballs ached, and then his temples began to ache, the pain seeming to circle around inside his head. It would not go away with aspirin, and then he got a severe backache....

Then, on the third day after his headache started, he became nauseated, spiked a fever, and began to vomit. His vomiting grew intense and turned into dry heaves.... [His face became frozen in a mask-like state. His eyeballs, as well as his tongue and mouth, turned red and his skin took on a yellowish shade.]

When Monet failed to show up for work, his colleagues began to wonder about him, and eventually they went to his bungalow to see if he was all right.... They looked at Monet and realized that he needed to get to a hospital.... The doctors thought he should go to Nairobi Hospital, the best private hospital in East Africa.... He could still walk, and he seemed able to travel by himself.... They put him in a taxi to the airport, and he boarded a Kenya Airways flight....

[During the flight on the crowded 35-passenger

propeller plane, he became violently ill, potentially spreading the virus to everyone on board, especially those in his immediate vicinity. The virus was dissolving his internal organs, turning them to a shapeless mass even before they completely failed, causing him excruciating pain.] His liver, kidneys, lungs, hands, feet, and head were becoming jammed with blood clots.... He didn't seem to be fully aware of pain any longer because the blood clots lodged in his brain were cutting off blood flow. His personality was being wiped away by brain damage. This is called depersonalization, in which the liveliness and details of character seem to vanish.... It could be said that the “who” of Charles Monet had already died while the “what” of Charles Monet continued to live....

[When the plane landed, Monet managed to take a taxi to the Nairobi Hospital before collapsing in the waiting room.] The other patients in the waiting room stood up and moved away from him, calling for a doctor.

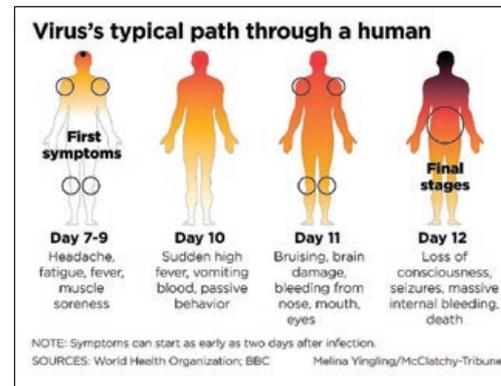
If that description is so revolting that it is hard to read, imagine how far worse



Elephants enter Kitum Cave, Mt. Elgon, thought to be a possible origin of the deadly Ebola virus.



Scientists believe that the bats living in the Mt. Elgon caves could be serving as an unaffected host to the Ebola virus.



it would be to witness the actual disease. Indeed, Ebola has the telltale signs of a biblical plague, reminding us, for instance, of a verse like this (*Zechariah 14:12*): “...And his flesh will waste away while he still stands on his feet; his eyes will waste away in their sockets, and his tongue shall waste away in his mouth.”

It can devastate a person in 10 days the way an auto-immune disease ravages the body in 10 years. And since it can take a week or more for symptoms to fully surface, in that time the infected person can infect countless others, who can infect countless others, and so on, without anyone knowing it, until it starts killing in epidemic proportions. (Although the Ebola virus is transmitted to other people when an infected individual begins to show symptoms, the early symptoms often resemble common ailments; in many cases, victims thought they had a cold or stomachache, not realizing it was Ebola and that they were infectious.) In 2001, two scientists even suggested that the Black Death that wiped out 25 million people in Europe might have been caused by an Ebola-like virus (see Editor’s introduction).

The potential danger of Ebola is no mere figment of the media’s sensationalist imagination. It has already taken the lives of thousands of people in the past few months alone. The danger is so real that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a statement in September saying that Ebola cases in West Africa could rise to 1.4 million by January.

Until very recently, people in America

watched Ebola from afar. Horrible as it was, it was happening in distant, under-developed Africa. Then, in September, it hit home. Literally. A man in Dallas was diagnosed with it and soon thereafter died. Amid assurances from the highest authorities that the situation was under control, two of the nurses who treated the victim contracted it—and one even boarded crowded flights back and forth between Dallas and Cleveland, potentially infecting hundreds of others, before she tested positive and was put into quarantine.

After that crisis seemed to pass, and everyone breathed a huge sigh of relief, a doctor in New York who had recently returned from treating victims in West Africa, was diagnosed with Ebola, but not before he had taken mass transit and gone bowling (see Sidebar).

All this has made people extremely jittery. Is America on the verge of a modern day Black Plague?



US Customs and Border Protection officers working during screenings for the Ebola virus at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York, October 11, 2014.



A Coast Guard health technician screens a passenger, right, who arrived from Sierra Leone at Chicago's O'Hare airport.

