

“The Beginning of Birth Pains”

November 12, 2023

Matthew 24:1-14

I. Introduction

All day Tuesday, Jesus had been grilled, questioned, and probed by the Jewish religious leaders but, in spite of all their trick questions, they hadn’t been able to find anything wrong or inappropriate with any of Jesus’ answers. [1 Peter 2:22](#) says, “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” Now, as the day was coming to a close, Jesus and His disciples left Jerusalem to go to Bethany where they stayed each night ([Matthew 21:17](#)). On the way, they had to cross over the Mount of Olives where they were able to look back and see a spectacular view of the Temple and the entire city of Jerusalem. [Mark 13:1](#) says that “As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!’”

Jesus’ reply, “[I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down,](#)” must have shocked the disciples. They couldn’t imagine how the temple could be destroyed or why God would allow such a thing to happen. But, as they walked along, the disciples may have felt that they had been right all along, Jesus was the Messiah and He was about to show Himself to the world.

From the Old Testament, Jewish scholars had found promises of future blessing, deliverance, and prosperity for the Jews. They knew God had promised to overcome all their enemies and to establish His eternal kingdom of righteousness and judgment on the earth. They knew that the Lord’s Anointed One—the Messiah—would come and establish the rule and reign of David again on earth—a reign of peace, and safety that would never end. Their great longing was to see the day when God restored the kingdom as He had promised.

From Daniel’s prophesies of the seventy weeks in [Daniel 9:20-27](#), as well as other prophesies, the Jews of Jesus’ day, including His disciples, felt the time was ripe for the Messiah’s coming. Then John the Baptist had appeared on the scene. He reminded everyone of the prophet Elijah and [Malachi 4:5](#) which says, “[See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.](#)” So,

when Jesus began His ministry of preaching and healing, many Jews were convinced that He was the promised Messiah who would bring the promised deliverance and blessing to Israel. And, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the colt, everyone was beside themselves in anticipation of the arrival of the long-awaited Son of David and His reign of peace, prosperity, and safety that would never end.

At that point, however, Jesus' ministry quickly and radically departed from their expectations. According to their thinking, the next steps would be the gathering of the nations against the Messiah and His victory over them. This idea was also in the minds of the 12 Apostles. In some way they ignored, rationalized, or spiritualized Jesus' teachings about His suffering and dying. They, like even the Old Testament prophets, saw the Messiah's coming and establishing His kingdom as a single event. As Jesus was nearing Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, [Luke 19:11](#) says, “**While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.**” Even the disciples were certain of His next move—His destruction of the nations—they were just curious about the timing. When they said, “**Tell us when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?**” Their question really was, “*Is it going to be in the next few days or weeks?*”

In [Mark 13:1-36](#) and [Luke 21:5-36](#) we find two other accounts of this same discourse, called the Olivet Discourse. Luke focused more on the historic details of the destruction of the temple and the fall of Jerusalem. In Matthew's and Mark's records, Jesus hinted at the destruction of the Temple, but the emphasis was on a more future fulfillment. In today's Scripture, Jesus gave a preview of general conditions on the earth leading up to His return. Jesus answered the second part of their question—“**What will be the sign of your coming?**”—by describing the initial group of six signs which will occur just before His coming. Like birth pains precede the birth of a baby, these signs are the birth pains preceding or leading up to Jesus' return to the earth to rule forever.

II. Birth Pains

Jesus began His teaching with a warning: “**Watch out that no one deceives you.**” Throughout the years, many events may deceive Jesus’ followers into thinking that the end of the age has arrived. Continually, there have been wars and rumors of wars, these would be what we would call “false labor pains.” The events of **Matthew 24-25** will be unique to the end times in their detail, sequence, and scale. Like true labor pains, which come just before birth, these events will occur with increasing frequency and severity until the Messiah finally returns to the earth. The Books of Daniel and Revelation have much more to say about all this.

A. False Messiahs The first birth pain to signal Christ’s return will be widespread deception by false messiahs—people claiming to be sent by God. There were false christ or messiahs before Jesus’ time and after. Jesus was saying that the deception in those days will increase and be more convincing. When Jesus warned, “**Watch out that no one deceives you,**” He is really telling them to “*keep your eyes open.*” Turn to **2 Peter 2:1-3**. The ultimate false messiah and deceiver will be the Antichrist. Just like the first disciples, we need to watch out for false messiahs—false teachers. The 2nd birth pain is . . .

B. Disputes and Wars This pain will involve intensified and unparalleled disputes and wars among nations and kingdoms of the world. Following the analogy of labor pains, the implication is that the conflicts will increase both in number and intensity as the time for the return of Christ approaches—until, as **Dan. 11, Zechariah 14 and Revelation** indicate, they will explode into a grand holocaust of bloodshed and carnage. But Jesus said that believers during that time should not be “**alarmed**” or frightened because those things are certain evidence that God’s plan is unfolding according to His will. Those events, horrifying and destructive as they will be, must take place. They are indications of the end, but as **Matthew 24:6** says: “**the end is still to come.**”

C. Worldwide Devastation Another birth pain preceding the end time will be worldwide devastation. In addition to the deception of false-christs and wars among nations, there will be natural disasters of unbelievable size that will arise. **Luke 21:11** adds, “**There will be great earthquakes, and in various places**

plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.” The world has witnessed many earthquakes, famines, and plagues, but these will be nothing compared to the disasters of the end times. Jesus said, “All these things are the beginning of birth pains.”

D. Severe Persecution of Believers The fourth labor pain will be severe persecution of believers by the evil, anti-Christian world. Jesus had given a similar warning earlier, turn to Matthew 10:16-20. Being identified with Christ’s name will cost believers their freedom, their rights, their respect, and even their lives. Jesus’ disciples—Christians—will feel the wrath and alienation from humanity for following Him and proclaiming His message. The hatred of God will be directed at His followers. When Paul said in Gal. 6:17 that he bore in his “body the marks of Christ,” he was saying that he had received wounds that were really directed at Christ. Because people could not get to Christ, they abused the one who represented Him.

2 Timothy 3:12 says, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

1 Peter 4:16 adds, “However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”

E. Defection of False Believers The fifth birth pain is a consequence of the fourth—defection of false believers. As the persecution intensifies and believers are arrested, hated, and martyred for Christ’s sake, many *supposed* Christians will defect. 1 John 2:19 says, “They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.” To prove that their defection is sincere—real, they will join fellow unbelievers in attacking God’s people. Jesus gave 3 reasons for their defection.

1. The cost will be too high. Turn to Matthew 13:20-21. Every cause has hangers-on who love to be associated with it while it is popular but quickly back-pedal as soon as criticism or conflicts arise. Just consider those who signed anti-Semitic statements at the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war who quickly recanted when their names or organizations were made known. In the same way, John says that these pretenders, these false Christians will leave Christian fellowship because they were never really part of it. For them, the cost is too high. A 2nd reason for defection is that . . .

2. The deception will be too convincing. Some false believers will defect because they are deceived by a false gospel. [2 Corinthians 11:13-15](#) says, “For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.” Until the very end, Satan will continue to masquerade as an angle of light.

[Revelation 17](#) seems to indicate that false religions, symbolized by the great harlot of Babylon, will flourish.

3. Sin will be too attractive. A third reason for defection is that sin will be too attractive. Jesus said that as wickedness increases most people’s love for righteousness, truth, and the things of God will grow cold. Many people who are initially drawn to the gospel will turn away from it because of the attractiveness of sin. Turn to Paul’s description, [turn to 2 Timothy 3:1-5](#). Doesn’t this sound like today?

When He said, “But he who stands firm to the end will be saved,” Jesus reminded Christians that a disciple’s real commitment to Him is demonstrated in whether he or she remains steadfast. Jesus is faithful to provide the resources needed to withstand any difficulty that may come—all one needs to do is ask. As He said in [Matthew 28:20](#) Jesus will be with us to the end of the age.

F. Worldwide preaching The sixth and last birth pain to indicate that the end time and that Jesus’ return as the conquering Messiah is near will be the worldwide preaching of the gospel. [Rev. 7:1-8 and 14:1-7](#) teach that God will choose and seal 144,000 Jewish evangelists who will carry the kingdom message to the ends of the earth. According to [Revelation 14:6](#), they will be followed by an angel who “had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.”

When Jesus said, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the whole world as a testimony to the nations, then the end will come,” the end is the Lord’s return at the end of the age to establish His kingdom on earth that is in view here—the return the disciples and the Jews were looking for—not His return in what we call the Rapture. After the final and total evangelization of the world, man’s day will be finished, his rebellion will be over, and his opportunity for salvation will be gone.

III. Conclusion—The Purpose of Prophecy

Many study prophecy in a vain attempt to figure out what Jesus declared to be unknown—the time of the end and His return. (We have read or heard of men and women who have incorrectly identified the date.) The Bible doesn't record prophecy of end-time activity just for curiosity's sake. Prophecy about the future is always given for the purpose of affecting behavior in the present.

A. First, it encourages godly living. In the middle of His prophecy, in [Matthew 24:25](#), Jesus said, “**See, I have told you ahead of time.**” He told His disciples—He told us—what will happen so that we aren't deceived; so that we may develop godly perseverance in the midst of all kinds of calamities; so that our love for Him and each other will not diminish as wickedness grows around us; and so that the testimony of our words and lives will remain steadfast and pure to the end. At the end of Mark's record of Jesus' Olivet discourse in [Mark 13:36](#) Jesus said, “**What I say to you, I say to everyone, ‘Watch!’**”

B. Secondly, it gives us confidence about the future. We may be unable to determine “the time and events,” but we can be sure that God is in control of all the events that will occur. He already knows what is going to happen. The end of the world will come only when God says so, then Jesus will return visibly and powerfully. With this hope and confidence in God we can stand firm no matter how bad things get.

C. Thirdly, it warns of difficult times ahead. Being forewarned is being forearmed. Knowing that there will be false messiahs and difficult times, we can be ready. We can test what they say and not be misled by those who “tickle our ears” with what we want to hear. Knowing about the coming devastation, we won't be caught off guard. Jesus gave this information so that all Christians can endure and live appropriately in the difficult times ahead until He returns.

D. Finally, it encourages evangelism. Not only does prophecy encourage godly living, but it also encourages evangelism. Whether at the end of a person's life or the end of the age, judgment is coming. We must “**go and make disciples of all nations**” before it is too late. **Turn to [Ezekiel 3:18-19](#).** We know the rest of the story and we need to share it with others. The closing words of the Book of Jude are appropriate for us today—**Jude 1:17-23**