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Birth Pains Before the Coming of Christ – Matthew 24:1-8

By Steven J. Hogan

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Jesus is with His disciples on the Mount of Olives and they ask Him three questions. A few days before it is said of the disciples – *"they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately"* (Lk. 19:11). Jesus then makes His triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the crowd is shouting, *"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord"* (Lk. 19:38). Like most Jews, the disciples were thinking that it wouldn't be long before Jesus was anointed as King of Israel.

So they ask Jesus these questions – *"When will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"* (Matt. 24:3). The first referred to something Jesus had said earlier about their beautiful temple being torn down, that *"not one stone here will be left upon another"* (Matt. 24:2). I don't believe Jesus answers this question in Matt. 24, but it is answered in Lk. 19:41-44, 21:20-22, 23:27-31. And the temple was destroyed around 70 AD.

As for the next two questions, the disciples were probably thinking that before the end of the age of man, before Jesus was anointed as King that He would give some spectacular signs, like angels appearing, trumpets blasting, or a great celestial light. But they had no idea that there would be a church age. The disciples completely missed the meaning of the parable Jesus had recently shared – *"A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return…*" (Lk. 19:12-15). They did not realize the questions they asked and the answers they received would be more relevant to a future generation of disciples, for those living in the end-times.

So let's look at these last two questions. First, let's examine the two key terms in vs. 3, *"coming"* and *"age".* The word coming, from the Greek *"parousia",* conveys two thoughts, arrival and presence. It's a singular noun that speaks of a person's arrival at a place and ongoing presence. Christ's 1st coming occurred about 2,000 years ago and lasted close to 33 years, and His 2nd coming will begin in the near future. This word coming appears in Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, and 39. And in Matt. 24:27, 30, 42, 44, 46, and 50, there's the word, *"erchetai",* a verb translated as coming or arriving. *"They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky."* Matt. 24:30

The second key term is the word *"age"*. It's defined as a period of time or history marked by a central figure or feature. Gal. 1:4 speaks of *"this present evil age"*, that time from when Adam and Eve sinned and the devil became the leading evil influence in the world (1 Jn. 5:19) until that time when Christ returns and is perfectly ruling the earth. And in vss. 6, 13, and 14, Jesus speaks of the *"end",* and He's referring to the end of this age.

The disciples asked Jesus for two signs and His answers are in vss. 29-30, but they didn't really understood them at that time. But Jesus

told them and us a lot more than just these two signs. Jesus loves us and doesn't want those living in the end-times to be surprised, to be caught off guard. He wants us to see all the signs described in vss. 4-30 so we are on the alert, so we are ready for His return, so we are looking forward to being with Him. Heb. 10:25

Let's go to Matt. 24:4-8. These verses describe what Jesus calls *"birth pangs"* or birth pains, and they affect all kinds of people – Christians, non-Christians, Jews, Gentiles. Birth pains are what a mother experiences before her baby is born. They usually start slow, but pick up in frequency and intensity – there are more and more of them and they get harder and harder. Just as birth pains don't begin at the start of a mother's pregnancy, so too the birth pains described in Matt. 24 don't begin at the start of the church age but are occurring now in the last years of this age. And similar to how the birth pains of a mother result in the birth of her child, so too the birth pains are an essential part of God's plan to bring about the return of His Son.

The first birth pain is deception, that many will come in Christ's name and deceive people, mislead people, lie to people. Of all that Jesus has to say in vss. 4-30, this is first for a reason. He does not want any person, saved or lost, to be tricked, to believe error, to be duped by disinformation. Jesus rightfully and strongly hates deceivers, these false Christs, these fake pastors, these *"fools… blind guides… hypocrites… serpents… brood of vipers."* Matt. 23:16-33

With increasing lawlessness and calamities in these end-times, life will be extremely difficult, and people will be looking for answers, for peace and safety. They will be vulnerable and susceptible to false teaching, fake churches, and AI error. So Jesus warns us to *"see to it",* to be on the lookout for liars who don't tell the truth, who promote a false gospel. He wants us to be discerning, to know the difference between

what is true and false, what is of God and what is of the devil. In a key prophecy passage, Paul tells us, *"Let no one in any way deceive you."* 2 Thess. 2:3

Second, there will be wars and rumors of wars – and Jesus says they *"must take place."* Yes, some leaders seek peace in this evil world, but only Jesus will bring true and lasting peace. Now most people in the world will be hearing about these wars, whether it's from the TV, internet, or a person. So some countries are having wars, but many will not. And if only some people are experiencing these wars, then they are only happening in *"various places",* which is what vs. 7 says with reference to famines and earthquakes. Rev. 6:8 substantiates this point, for it says that only a *"fourth of the earth"* will be affected by these birth pains.

Jesus tells you, *"See that you are not frightened",* which is relevant for the entire end-times. And whether a person hears about these catastrophic events or experiences them, the normal, natural tendency is to be afraid. During the first week of the Iran war, this blog site saw a 50% increase in views. That's because people are fearful when they hear about wars – they worry about what might happen. So remember, Jesus tells you not to be afraid. Get truths, commands, and promises from God to bolster your faith and strengthen your soul. *"Do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God… I will help you."* Is. 41:10

Note what vs. 6 says – *"these things must take place, but that is not yet the end,"* that is, not the end of this age. We will be witnessing more and more wars, but just because we do doesn't mean that Christ is immediately coming back, that He is *"right at the door"* (vs. 33). Vss. 7-30 list many other things that need to happen before Christ returns to rapture the church.

Third and fourth, there will be famines and earthquakes (vs. 7). Famines, a scarcity, a lack of food, can be caused by drought, wars, natural disasters, the economy, etc. It's easy to see how famines are now and will be occurring in this world because of the above factors. And there will be earthquakes, the sudden rupture of the earth's crust which causes a great shaking and cataclysmic damage. Again, they will not be happening in every country, in every place, but only in some places, in *"various places."*

Vs. 8 gives the conclusion to this passage about birth pains. *"All these things"* that we just talked about *"are merely the beginning of birth pains."* This verse goes along with vs. 6 – *"these things must take place, but that is not yet the end."* I believe these verses describe the present condition of our world relative to Christ's coming, that we are at the beginning of this end-times' stage that leads to the end of this age and Christ's return to rapture the church.

A pregnant woman who is experiencing early labor, beginning birth pains, knows her baby is coming soon, and it's not usually in a few minutes, but in hours. I don't believe Christ's coming is a few years away, but at least a decade or two, if not more. As we will see in the coming verses and in the coming years, many more things must occur before believers on earth will head to heaven to be with Jesus. And only God knows how long these beginning birth pains must last before we get to the next stage, the transition, the tribulation, which we'll examine in vss. 9-14.

There are a few more things I need to say about birth pains:
* These birth pains are talked about in other passages – Mark 13:5-8, Luke 21:8-11a, Rev. 6:1-8.
* Luke 21:11a includes plagues as one of the birth pains, and Rev. 6:5-6 speaks of economic distress, what seems to be hyperinflation.

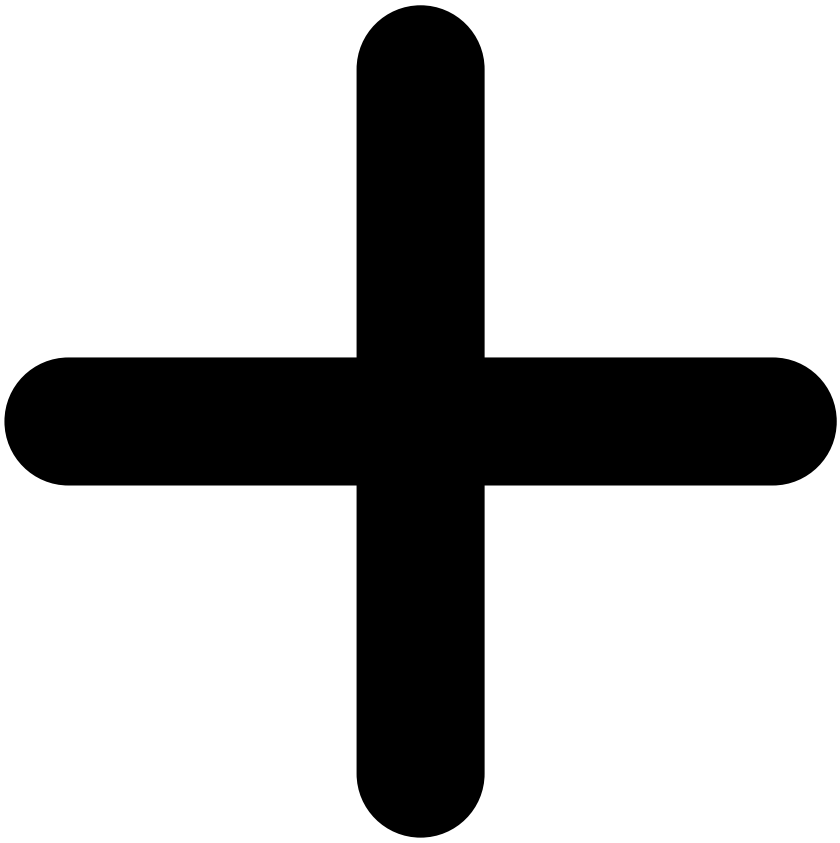
* Deception, wars, earthquakes, famines, plagues, and hyperinflation have all occurred throughout history, but will be more frequent, intense, and destructive in the end times.
* God does not tell us when the birth pains start. Some think they start at the beginning of Dan. 70th week and others before the beginning of this week.

* The birth pains are not part of God's end-times' wrath, also called the Day of the Lord. Why not? Because the birth pains (Matt. 24:4-8) occur before the signs in the heaven (Matt. 24:29) and the signs in the heavens occur before the Day of the Lord (Acts 2:19-21). Therefore, the birth pains must occur before the Day of the Lord, and thus are not part of God's end-times' wrath. Rev. 6:1-8, similar to Matt. 24:4-8, also makes it clear that these birth pains happen before God's end-times' wrath (vss. 16-17).

* The birth pains are wake-up calls, are to alert us to the fact that we are in the end-times, and that Christ is coming soon to rapture the church and pour out His wrath on earth. Pray for the saved to be spiritually awakened so they are ready for Christ's return (Rom. 13:11, Matt. 24:42), and for the lost to be spiritually shaken so they repent of their sins. Luke 13:1-5

Matt. 24 is for our time, is for those of us who are living in these end-times, in these last years before Christ's return. More than anyone else in history, we need to know these God-given signs, for they show us that Christ will be coming soon to take us home to heaven. Matt. 24 is a great summary of what will be happening in the end-times. Might God give you the grace to study it, understand it, be stirred by it, and then share it with others. *"I will tell you everything the Lord says and will keep nothing back from you"* (Jer. 42:4). *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations... baptizing them... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Matt. 28:19-20

P.S. The road is rough in the years leading up to Christ's coming, for there will be birth pains, but God will lead, strengthen, and bless the believers on earth at that time. Here is a good summary of Matthew 24, this most important chapter for believers at this time in history – *"Matthew 24 – A Road Map of the End Times".*



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