

THE BEGINNING OF BIRTH PANGS

The “guardrails” of Old Testament prophecy are found in the 70 weeks of Daniel’s prophecy as seen in Daniel 9:24-27. Here God gives an outline of His prophetic program for Israel from the time of the command to rebuild Jerusalem (Neh. 2:1-8) until the Second Coming of the Messiah. The OT prophecy was strictly about ISRAEL and not the Church (in terms of God’s people). Daniel 9:24 SPECIFICALLY says, “Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city...”. Daniel’s people were the JEWS and his holy city was JERUSALEM. This has NOTHING to do with the Church.

The reason this is significant is because in Matthew 24:4-35 Jesus ties the entire context of what He is saying about “the end of the age” to the 70th week of Daniel as seen in Matthew 24:15. Thus, to think outside the “guardrails” of Daniel 9:24-27 at this point is to be in error! In the proper interpretation of prophecy we need to think within the inspired boundaries that God has given us or we will merely be engaging in speculative error!

Matthew 24:4-8 corresponds very closely to the first 4 seal judgments of Revelation 6:1-8. The first seal judgment of Revelation 6:1-2 corresponds to the deception emphasis of Matthew 24:4-5. The second seal judgment of Revelation 6:3-4 corresponds to the world war emphasis of Matthew 24:6. And that brings us to the 3rd and 4th seal judgments of Revelation 6:5-8 which correspond to Matthew 24:7-8.

Matthew 24:7 (NKJV)

7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.

Famines here corresponds to the 3rd seal in Revelation 6:5-6.

Revelation 6:5–6 (NKJV)

5 When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come and see.” So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.

6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.”

War is often followed by famine and so it will be here on a global scale. A day’s wage (the worth of a denarius) will only buy a quart of wheat or three quarts of barley. This is a way of describing extreme food shortage.

Pestilences is not in the older manuscripts but it is represented in the fourth seal of Rev. 6:7-8.

The fourth seal is more comprehensive in nature with the emphasis being on DEATH – perhaps as an accumulative effect of the previous judgments.

Revelation 6:7–8 (NKJV)

7 When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come and see.”

8 So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and

Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.

The word “death” can be understood as “pestilence” and is so translated in the NASB. The idea of “pestilence” is that of a plague or disease with deadly effects.

“Modern man has crowned all his other insanities by adding pestilence to his arsenals. We have enough bacteria stockpiled today to infect people with scores of diseases, and we have chemical agents that can destroy entire populations with terrifying ease.” -John Phillips

Can anyone say “Covid”? Who knows what lies behind the pestilences of the fourth seal? Perhaps things like germ warfare, biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction. Whatever is involved, a stupendous amount of people will die!

Note a fourth part of the world’s population will die. At present that would be about 2 billion people. That is a lot of death in a short amount of time.

But all this is just the beginning meaning it applies to the first half of the Tribulation Period. Jesus said...

Matthew 24:8 (NKJV)

8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Everything Jesus has just mentioned in Matthew 24:4-8 are the beginning of sorrows.

The word “sorrows” is more literally “birth pangs” suggesting a process of travail that will result in delivery. This is the very same word that Paul used in 1 Thess. 5:3 in describing what will come upon the world at the inauguration of the Day of the Lord judgments.

1 Thessalonians 5:3 (NKJV)

3 For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

This adds evidence to the fact that Jesus is addressing the time frame known as the 70th week of Daniel or the 7-year Tribulation Period. This language comes out of prophetic passages in the OT dealing with “the Day of the LORD” such as that which is found in Isa. 13:8 and Isaiah 26:17 (cf. Isa. 66:7-8; Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 22:23; 30:5-7; 48:41; Hos. 13:13; Mic. 4:9-10; Rev. 12:2).

Just as the early birth pangs of a pregnant woman signal the birth of the child is near at hand, in like manner these “sorrows” are early birth pangs indicating “the end of the age” and the beginning of a new one is very close, but yet there is more to come before DELIVERANCE takes place.

“As in childbirth, such agonies will be followed by much more severe pains before deliverance occurs with the return of Christ in glory.” – Howard Vos

“All pre-tribulationists insist that the second, third, and fourth seal judgments of Revelation (6:3-8) clearly depict the first half of the tribulation and parallel the judgments in Matthew 24:5-8.” – John F. Hart

The rabbis spoke of “birth pains” that would precede the coming of the Messiah. In this they were right, and Jesus is here filling in the details.

Christ came offering His people kingdom peace on the condition of repentance and faith in Him. They refused and as a people have not known peace since then.

However, that is not the whole story. Jesus here in Matthew 24 fills us in on the rest of the story. In order for God’s people Israel to know peace they first have to come to recognize Jesus as their Messiah/God. This they will only do after experiencing the travail of the 70th week of Daniel (cf. Zech. 13:8-9).

Deception, war, famine, pestilence, and earthquakes define the first half of this week. And then it gets worse until finally, the Son of Man breaks forth in glory at the 2nd Coming to come and deliver His people who in the crucible of great tribulation will have finally come to faith in Christ (cf. Mt. 23:39).

FAITH IN CHRIST as Savior and Lord is the ultimate issue in time and for all eternity!

1 John 5:12–13 (ESV)

12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.