

The Beginning of Birth Pangs II **Matthew 24:3—8**

Prophecy is always a fascinating study because everyone wants to know what the future holds. Although we can find out much about the future by studying Scripture we have to realize that prophecy generally is all about God's program for Israel leaving the Church, the Body of Christ, mostly in the dark when it comes to our future. We know our future includes a Rapture, dwelling in heaven and ruling angels but beyond that our future is hazy. Israel, on the other hand, is the subject of hundreds of prophecies concerning their future.

As we look into these prophetic events we need to realize that these things are focused on Israel, not the Church. With this in mind it's important not to get so wrapped up in Israel's future that you forget the importance of discovering how God wants to use you in the here and now.

These prophetic events are not being fulfilled in this Age of Grace. Israel's program needs to remain completely separate from this Mystery program of the Church. When Jesus told the Disciples that there would be antichrists, wars, famines and earthquakes He did not have the United States in mind. Everything He spoke revolved around Israel and her prophetic program. This means we need to interpret what Jesus is saying in terms of Israel just prior to the beginning of the Tribulation. He has been preparing the Disciples to lead the remnant of believing Jews through the Tribulation and into the Millennial Kingdom, giving them vital information to complete their job.

Obviously the Disciples never went into the Tribulation. This confuses many who don't understand how God has dealt with men in different ways at different times. Instead of seeing the Dispensation of Law come to a close when Israel rejected the Holy Spirit's call to come into the Kingdom through Stephan (Acts 7:54—60), God instituted the Dispensation of the Gospel of God. Seeing Jesus standing was an indication that God's wrath was about to be poured out on the world in the Tribulation (Psalm 110:1) but instead of wrath, God poured out His grace in this special dispensation. This Age of Grace will come to a close at the Rapture and Israel's prophetic program will once again come into play, picking up where it was left off, just shy of the beginning of the Tribulation.

Events before the Tribulation

Antichrists

Let's go into more detail about what will transpire before the Tribulation actually begins. The first thing the Disciples are warned of is to be aware of false Christs and false prophets. These are people who come presenting themselves as Messiah or as men representing God. This will happen before the antichrist begins his rise in world power and domination driven by Satan. This distinction is made clear in 1 John 2:18.

1 John 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

John is writing to the believers in Israel, specifically those who were saved under the Gospel of the Kingdom. We know this from 1 John 1:1 that states that John is writing from the standpoint of what he was taught by Jesus on this earth. Today we are to follow instructions from Jesus Christ that were given through the Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 5:16). The little children he is referring to are the Little Flock of believers, the righteous remnant of Israel. As John is writing to the Kingdom saints he is aware of the proliferation of people claiming to be Israel's Messiah. This was one of the signs that the end of the age for Israel had already begun. 1 Peter was also written to Israel and chapter 4 verse 7 declares that the end of all things is near, supporting John's statement.

This end to Israel's prophetic program is often confused with the latter times of the Mystery program mentioned by Paul in 1 Timothy 4:1 (see also 2 Timothy 3:13). It seems that we will experience the same issues that the Kingdom saints will experience in their end times, a strong pull to put aside sound doctrine.

Unfortunately, many will be deceived by these antichrists with their false doctrines. They will believe the lies propagated by these godless men and turn their back on the truths of Scripture to follow smooth talking shysters. This is why we need to be grounded in the Word and why Paul tells Timothy to guard the truths of the Mystery that Paul had passed on to him (1 Timothy 6:20—21).

This pull to believe the antichrists and false prophets will intensify during the Tribulation. They will not only have words to pull people away from the truth but will support these words with great signs and wonders. Almost all of Israel will be ready to accept the antichrist when he comes on the scene. With charismatic words and great miracles the antichrist will appear as the Messiah. It will only be by the power of God that the elect are not drawn to believe that their Messiah has come (Matthew 24:24; Revelation 13:14). Those who do not believe the antichrist is the Messiah will be shunned as heretics and expelled from Jewish society. 1 John 4:1 warns that not everyone who comes in the name of the Lord is of God. They are to test the spirits (against the Word of God) to see if they are indeed from God.

Wars and rumors of wars

With Israel currently surrounded by enemies it is not too much of a stretch to see why Jesus said there would be wars and rumor of wars. These Muslim nations hate Israel and would like nothing better than to exterminate her for good. We can also understand that when nation rises up against nation that it is most likely talking about these nations who hate Israel will also be fighting against each other. We see this even today.

It's possible that the invasion of Israel by Gog in Ezekiel 38—39 will happen before the Tribulation but after the Rapture. The man who draws up a treaty plan to stop this aggression against Israel and give the Middle East peace would be looked upon as a great diplomat by the world and as the Messiah by Israel. Since God will decimate Gog, the world should recognize God as the protector of Israel. However, what may happen is that the antichrist steps up, uses the events of the war to puff himself up, put together a treaty with the nations and takes full credit for establishing peace in the Middle East.

Regardless of when the war of Gog will take place we know that Israel will be the epicenter for wars. Satan, through the antichrist, will take advantage of this and bring his man to the forefront of political domination of the world.

Birth pangs

The Tribulation is often compared to the pains of childbirth. Labor pains start out small but soon intensify to the point of being almost unbearable. The events of the Tribulation will start out innocuously but quickly intensify to the point of being unbearable. Men will even seek death but will be unable to find it (Revelation 9:6). Even as things are progressively worsening, Jesus instructs the Disciples that many of these things are merely the prelude to the beginning of the actual Tribulation. All through this Jesus is teaching them to trust Him. Those who trust in Him have no need to fear the events that are about to come upon them (Matthew 6:25; 10:26—31). For believers during the Tribulation their great distress will quickly turn to joy at the end when they see Christ coming back to set up His Kingdom.

We also need to live a life fully entrusted to Christ. By walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16—25), being faithful in giving our life fully to the Lord, we have no reason to fear what happens to us. When we approach something that we fear our first reaction should be turning to God in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6—7). The peace that comes from God is the absolute best answer to any prayer because when living a life grounded in God's peace it really does not matter what happens. Imagine losing a loved one, your job or your house and having a complete peace about it knowing that God will take care of you according to His infinite love. This is the peace we can have if we are truly walking in the Spirit, allowing Him to mold and shape us into the people He can best use for His glory.

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