The Birth Pains
Sane and Sensible Perspectives on the Last Days

The steady increase of calamities both natural and man-made have many thinking (fearing) that the “end of the world” is upon us. Wars and threats of war, freakish weather, earthquakes and famines are certainly signs of an end, but they are not signs of the End. They are signs warning us that the age of grace (begun at the cross) is drawing to a close. Jesus calls these events “the beginning of the birth pangs” and says that we are not to be alarmed by them. Why? Far worse is coming!

For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These things are the beginning of the birth pangs [the intolerable anguish and suffering]. Mark 13:8 AMP

Chief Characteristics
Whole books are written about most of these crucial components. These characteristics are summaries of what is grounded in scripture, not fabricated through speculation. Speculation is trying to “see” more than we are being shown. What we see by Biblical revelation is real enough, but a fuller view will only come as these still distant components draw nearer.

Why the “Pangs”?

The first wave of intense birth pangs signifies to a woman that the pregnancy is drawing to a close. The life within her that she has been nurturing ever since conception is ready to emerge. Her womb will no longer be needed; indeed, it will soon become fatal to her and the child if anything interferes with the approaching birth. That birth is a yet undetermined distance away, but it is now inevitable. What’s more, the contractions of hard labor will soon begin: she must get in the right place and position for them, since travelling during travail is both difficult and dangerous. Then, once the water breaks, there is nothing to do but hang on for dear life and push through to the other side, where (God willing) a healthy new-born baby will greet her.

Birth pangs produce in all sensible women an entire reorientation of their attitudes and activities. Perhaps, up to now the mother-to-be has enjoyed the slow-moving time of pregnancy, while the child grew incrementally within her. Accommodations had to be made to the changing reality, of course, but these she accepted gladly for the sake of the child to come. New dreams, plans and hopes became her daily bread as she warmed her heart by the thought of one day seeing her child face to face. Nevertheless, most of her life went on as usual. Occasionally, towards the end of this season, she felt the precursors of the pangs. She knows instinctively that they aren’t the true pangs, but a brief shadow crosses her countenance as she wonders if the dreadful pains of labor are about to begin. Then, she returns to her usual duties and distractions.
All this comes to a screeching half with the first intense realization that the birth pangs have begun. The now fast-approaching birth takes center stage. The birthing clock has begun ticking and nothing can stop it! It’s time to pack a bag for the hospital or clear a room in the house for home birth. She tells her husband and others in the circle of care. Is she certain? If she is, their lives change, too. All is now in moving in the quick-time of preparation. There may still be a waiting for the hard labor to begin, but now is the all-essential time of preparation. (See “Ways to Prepare” for more on this.) Other activities, no matter how useful or delightful, are set aside. This is not the time for going to the movies, reading books, or meals out. It is also not the time for allowing petty grievances to separate us from the ones we love and need. Attitudes and activities are “forced” to line up with the unavoidable reality of a birth about to happen. Both the unwanted labor pains and the highly desired child thrust into the forefront of everyone’s thoughts and plans.

That’s what these world-wide birth pains are meant to do for us.

Pre-Figured in Scripture

Every crucial component of the Last Days has already “appeared” in the Biblical prophetic narrative in the past, somewhat like a dress rehearsal for the final drama. These foreshadows are called “types” because they precede their ultimate expression (the “antitype”). As shadows of the future reality, however, they cast a revealing light of their own.

1. Travail in Childbirth

Had it not been for the Fall, no woman would ever be troubled by natural birth the way our Creator designed it to be. The curse brought a “multiplication” of pain in childbearing, indicating all manner of sorrows and levels of pain for women to endure. Likewise, had the Fall not occurred, Jesus could come as Lord to reign among us with no birth pangs and certainly no hard labor of the tribulation ever needing to precede His arrival. Eve’s curse and the labor pain of women, therefore, give us a prophetic foreshadowing of the Messiah’s Return.

To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.” Genesis 3:16 ESV

The connection of Eve’s curse to the Messiah is evident in the previous verse of Genesis where the Lord told the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” The serpent, Satan, has warred against Eve’s seed from the beginning. That mostly hidden spiritual warfare is soon to manifest upon the earth through all the systems of the world: political, economic and religious. These will entirely serve the dark agenda of the antichrist. The enemy not only sought to crush Jesus as He came the first time; he seeks to crush all who have His life in them now. Eve’s offspring will know the pains of this hard, spiritual labor. The Book of Revelation predicts that just such a sign of a woman “in agony” giving birth is scheduled to appear in heaven in the Last Days, foreshadowing the earthly reality.
And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. Revelation 12:1-2

ESV

The messianic implications of this curse, also, have tremendous symbolic significance if we draw a parallel to all previous generations of the Bride-to-be on earth, laboring for the Lord’s Harvest through prayer and faithful living, dreaming of the Day when He would return to take His rightful place upon the earth as Lord and King. “Easy for them” we may be tempted to think: all that they had to do was die in the faith, await the Return in the luxury of heaven, then come down with Him to reign—after the hard labor is over! We are the generation feeling the Birth Pangs, the generation that is called to go through the Tribulation. Nevertheless, we are all part of the same Bridal company. We can be sure that all previous Christians worth their salt, longed to be alive on the earth to see the things that we will see. No woman bearing a child wants someone else to take her place at the time of labor. She wants to go through it herself to make sure that her child gets her best efforts for a safe arrival.

2. Intercessory Travail

Just as physical birth requires labor and involves pain, so it is with spiritual birth. Everyone who has interceded for lost loved ones or cried out to God for their nation or their church, knows there is a difference between “arrow” prayers that find a quick answer and prevailing prayer which seems to never end. This labor of the heart always involves a “burden” that needs to be delivered. There is no satisfactory solution to this travail until God brings the answer or unless He shows that sufficient prayer has been made for it to be accomplished. God brings to birth upon the earth the things that He desires to do using the intercessory travail of His believing people.

It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. Galatians 4:18-20

ESV

The travail of intercession is not limited to people. The earth fell under the effects of the curse due to Adam’s fall, a sign that our sins always impact the innocent. The Lord is certainly “hearing” the cry of His creation as it groans “together in the pains of childbirth until now.” Is this not also a form of necessary intercession? If the earth is travailing, should we not join it?

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. Romans 8:20-22

Revealed by Scripture

The Bible exposes the secret plans and deceptive operations of the dark kingdom, even as it unveils the glorious realities of what our God is doing. The truths of scripture are, therefore, our
rock-solid building blocks for interpreting the times we are entering. Nevertheless, for biblical information to become true revelation both prayer and the Holy Spirit are needed.

3 As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” Matthew 24:3 ESV

Jesus’ description of the birth pains begins with these three questions by the disciples. Their master had earlier predicted the destruction of the Temple when they were leaving its magnificent grounds. From their present overview on the Mount of Olives, Herod’s Temple with its impressive surrounding structures would have appeared as imperishable as Jerusalem with its massive walls. The destruction of the former could only happen if the glorious city were overthrown by an invading army. Naturally, they wanted to know “when will these things be?”

Then, that first terrible image of national disaster evidently made their minds leap ahead—just as happens with us—to fears about the end of the world itself. Their next two questions have to do with the Last Days: “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” This is important because Jesus takes advantage of this opportunity to answer the last two questions, not the first. His answer gives us our definitive sequence of events for the Last Days. Let’s call it Jesus’ Own Timeline and make it the centerpiece of our End Times understanding. All the “Crucial Components” can be placed upon it in good order without causing confusion—if we follow Jesus’ timeline. It’s as if Jesus looked through the disciples’ concern and spoke directly to our own.

4 And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray.” Matthew 24:4-5 ESV

The first thing Jesus wants us to know about “these things” is the danger of being deceived. In advance of describing the events to come, He warns the disciples (and us), “See that no one leads you astray.” Evidently, there will be many coming during this time promising answers to the world’s woes, as if they were the hoped-for problem solver. Don’t think they are all going to say they are “Jesus Christ.” Some might, but that will immediately tag them as lunatics. These will be easy to spot and will likely fool only themselves. Far more likely, the deception will come through those who say that they have answers to the world’s problems.

“Messiah” is the word Jesus uses. It’s a term which means “savior,” not someone specifically by the name of Jesus (such as we know the true Messiah to be). The antichrist especially will appear to be the last best hope for humanity, someone uniquely “anointed” to lead us out of the earth’s many troubles. Such will be the problems, however, that even before that character is revealed “many will come” and through their false claims “they will lead many astray.” Keep in mind that not all deceivers are evil-minded. Many times, they are persuasive because they honestly believe they’ve come up with the right idea. Don’t believe people just because they seem sincere. Check everything out with biblically trained discernment.
6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. Matthew 24:6 ESV

Jesus gives a second warning. Perhaps He looks behind at the long span of history knowing full well how frightening wars were for the people caught up in them. He knows (by prophetic insight or judicious understanding) that there will always be wars on the earth—until He returns. Wars truly make people feel as if the world is coming to an end, because wars threaten our own part of the world to its core. Therefore, He knows that we “will hear of wars and rumors of wars” and that will press the idea upon us that the end of all things is near. But that is not the conclusion He wants us to take.

Instead, Jesus cautions us to not be “alarmed” no matter how many people say it’s the end. A war is alarming enough. Don’t add to it the false idea that it is any kind of indicator of the world’s end. In fact, He sees that a steady succession of wars “must take place.” This is a reality that cannot be wished away or legislated away. Know this: No amount of tears or treaties, prayers or politics, can change this lamentable fact. There will be wars. We also need to know with assurance that as long as there are wars, “the end is not yet.” Ironically, the antichrist will come as a man promising to end all wars. His covenant of peace will set in motion the Last Battle.

7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.  Matthew 24:7 ESV

With this one verse Jesus describes the birth pains. He specifically lists four things as the signs to watch for: “nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines.” Are these the only signs which qualify? What about floods and fires, tornadoes and hurricanes, volcanic eruptions and other natural disasters? Just as with the sin lists in scripture, there is no reason to suppose that this list could not be extended to include other things in the same general category. In fact, there is a “Convergence of Calamities” taking place that is, perhaps, unprecedented. Combined with the other major Biblical signs—the gospel, Jewish and global signs—no room is left for wondering if the Last Days are upon us. See Signs of the Second Coming for more on these unprecedented and unarguable signs.

In terms of nations and kingdoms at war with each other we need to observe two distinctions. The word translated as nation indicates what we would call racial or ethnic groups. This is huge. As a judgment upon the Tower of Babel, the Lord purposefully divided the world into the different tongues (ethnicities and races) in order to keep humanity from uniting against Him. Although this division has led to countless wars, no one group has ever been able to subdue all the others, thus keeping a precarious balance of power between the “tongues.” The increase of racial and ethnic hatred upon the earth shows that this “system” is breaking down and about to end. “Nation against nation” is, therefore, not only a sign of the birth pangs, it is also a sign that the world is being prepared to receive a savior—the antichrist—who promises an end to hostilities through a new world order, united under his leadership.
“Kingdom against kingdom” also needs expansion. For us moderns, kings that have kingdoms to rule sounds archaic—titles of the past only carried on now by figureheads and slightly crazy despots. This would be thinking too literally about kingship as we understand it (and that mostly from the movies!). A king of the past was simply the “head man”—the one who ruled a group, whether it was a tribe, a village, or a region. Our groups have changed as have our organizational structures.

Nevertheless, there is always someone at the top, the man or woman who holds power and authority. They may be elected, or they may have seized their position by force or through inheritance. How they acquired their power hardly matters: They are still “kings.” The group these modern kings rule over may be a city state or region as in the old days, or it may be a multinational corporation. Many of these “kingdoms” operate by their own rules and for their own purposes. These are always in competition with each other, only forming alliances with other economic entities to extend their own sphere of influence. This is already going on.

8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. Matthew 24:8 ESV

These four signs are just “the beginning.” As with a woman in labor, the first sign of serious birth pains foretell that the travail of hard labor is approaching. Then, the pains increase in frequency and intensity with intervals of relative calm in between. Finally, the time of unbroken travail arrives. We should expect something like this to happen. The chaos of nations and kingdoms will increase. So will natural disasters. There may be “breathers” in between, but these won’t last long—certainly not as they seemed to in the past. Economies, governments, civil society and nature itself will behave in “crazy” ways as the long-predicted shaking of all things intensifies. When watching the news, listen for the tell-tale phrase, “nothing like this has been seen before” or “this one broke all previous records.” That may be clue that another birth pain just struck the earth.

9 Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. Matthew 24:9 ESV

Having described the birth pangs in verse 7 and named them as such in verse 8, Jesus transitions to the next stage on the timeline. With the word “then” He reveals that the birth pangs lead into a time of “tribulation.” During the initial phase (we would say the first 3 ½ years of the Tribulation), there will be world-wide persecution of believers: “You will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake.” Never in history has this happened. Just as there has always been persecution, it has always been limited in scope to one or two nations at a time inflicting the persecution. During this tribulation, there will be nowhere to run to. The whole world will have turned against the church. As with physical birth, the “contraction pains” of catastrophic events will continue. To them will be added the “hard labor” of persecution. Compare with Mark.

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden
destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 ESV

Those who do not pay attention to the Birth Pangs in these Last Days will find themselves woefully unprepared for the hard labor that is coming. Paul wrote that unbelievers will be caught by events bringing sudden destruction, like a woman who is unable to escape labor pains once they begin. This is not a warning for the awake and aware church—we will understand the times and seasons. It is a description of what will happen to those who aren’t “fully aware” of the signs. This will sadly include unprepared Christians who have let their oil run out like the foolish virgins of the parable, along with unbelievers who are totally in the dark.5

Other Scriptures to Study

Mark: The Beginning of the Birth Pains

3 And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” 5 And Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one leads you astray. 6 Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. 7 And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains. 9 “But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. Mark 13:3-9 ESV

The Writer of Hebrews: The Final Shaking

25 See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” 27 This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:25-29 ESV

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For over a decade Steve Evans and Healing Streams have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, Matters of the Heart. Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit-filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, Getting to Heaven and/or an introduction to Living in the Spirit at our website.

1 Cambridge Dictionary defines speculation as “the act of guessing possible answers to a question without having enough information to be certain.” It derives from the Latin word “speculari” which means “to look at, view, observe” and originally indicated “close observation and intelligent contemplation.” By the late 1500s it gained the disparaging sense it carries today of “mere conjecture.” See etymonline.com.

2 Adam is the type; Jesus, the “second Adam” is the antitype: Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. Romans 5:14 ESV

3 Interesting that Jesus’ teaching on prevailing prayer is linked to the End Times: And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” Luke 18:7-8 ESV

4 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Hebrews 12:26-27 ESV

5 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he answered, ‘ Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. Matthew 25:1-13 ESV