

## Christ's Greatest Prophetic Discourse Part 2 of 8

We continue our verse by verse study of the gospel of Matthew, chapter 24 primarily verses 4-8. It's a wonderful joy as a pastor to preach the Word of God. We are commanded to preach the whole counsel of God, even the prophetic literature when we come to it. So we will preach it, even though some of the things of which we speak we will not necessarily experience. Other things we will, but certainly when we study prophecy, rich theological themes of who our God is really begin to find expression.

As we look at prophecy, we see that God providentially rules over all of His kingdom, all of His world, even the kingdoms of men. He will accomplish all that He has decreed, all of His sovereign purposes will be accomplished regardless of any of the opposition that He may find on the world today, whether it be human or demonic. So we come to Christ's greatest prophetic discourse once again. If you will recall, Jesus has pronounced judgment upon Israel, upon the temple, and now the disciples are confused. Their messianic hopes are somewhat dashed, they don't really know what's going on and their beloved temple is doomed, according to what Jesus has said. They ask Him in verse 3, "Tell us when will all these things be and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?" And as they sat upon the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave the longest answer to any question posed to Him in the New Testament.

We must remember that the disciples are thinking that all of the mysterious events being revealed to them by the Lord Jesus will come in some short and quick succession, culminating in the promised messianic kingdom. They had no idea that Jesus would soon ascend into heaven and that there would be a Church Age that would intervene before His ultimate *parousia*, His ultimate appearing. Beginning in verse 4 Jesus begins to answer their questions in reverse order. First He addresses the signs of His coming, and in verses 4-14 He describes six very specific signs called "birth pains" that will occur just prior to His appearing. I believe these to be a sequence of divine judgments analogous to a woman entering into labor, events that will increase in severity and rapidity until the messianic kingdom is birthed. These are far more than just natural disasters. These are divine judgments. In fact the concept of birth pains in Hebrew is a concept we see in the Old Testament that always is found in association with and symbolizes terrible calamities that accompany the day of the Lord. We see that in Isaiah 21:3, 26:17-18, 66:7, Jeremiah 4:31 and Micah 4:10.

What are these six signs? By way of review they are first, false messiahs in verses 4-5; second, nations at war in verses 6 through part of 7; third, the second part of verse 7 through 8 speak of natural disasters of epic proportions. Fourthly, in verse 9 He says there will be the persecution of tribulation saints. Fifthly, in verses 10-13 you will read of the defection of and betrayal by false believers, and verse 14, the sixth sign, we will read of mass evangelism. Before we look at some of these signs this morning I want to spend a few moments and make a bit of a case why I believe that all of these signs are future, that they are signs that did not occur in A.D. 70 as many people that I love and respect would believe have occurred. Let me give you nine reasons, and these are relevant just with the sign gifts in Matthew 24 and other texts. I believe there are many other reasons, but I'll just give you nine reasons rather briefly why I believe these signs that Jesus is talking about is something way beyond what occurred in A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.

First of all, these six signs are merely the beginning of birth pangs, verse 8 says, and they are therefore going to get far more severe. They're going to increase in frequency. Birth pangs do not occur at conception. They don't occur during pregnancy. They occur just prior to birth. It makes no sense to me to apply this to the destruction of Jerusalem, an event that occurred at the very beginning of the Church Age. Paul reminds us that Christ will return in judgment as a thief in the night. He will come without

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warning. He will come suddenly, unexpectedly, and when he speaks of this he uses the same figure of speech that Jesus does, that of birth pangs. In 1 Thessalonians 5:3 he says, "While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." And dear friends, that text and concept simply does not fit the historical facts of A.D. 70.

Another reason why I believe this is all future is that in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 we find that these texts parallel John's vision recorded in the book of Revelation. Revelation was written in the last decade of the first century, 94 to 96 A.D., thirty years after the fall of Jerusalem, near the end of Emperor Domitian's reign. We have a documented declaration of one of the early church fathers, Irenaeus, who lived in A.D. 120-202. He said that John's revelation was written "toward the end of Domitian's reign." In fact, that later date of the book of Revelation is affirmed by other church fathers. You can read of it in Clement of Alexandria's writing, of Origen and Victorinus, who wrote one of the earliest commentaries of Revelation. Also the writings of Eusebius and Jerome. I believe, since these are parallel accounts found in what Jesus is saying, as well as what's in the book of Revelation, that since the book of Revelation was written way beyond A.D. 70 that what Jesus is saying cannot refer to A.D. 70.

A third reason is that these events clearly parallel the prophecies of Daniel's 70th week, in Daniel 9:27 in particular. This describes a period that is distinctly Jewish in its context, relating to God's covenants with Israel and His judgments upon them. Since that is the case, this cannot be describing anything in the Church Age. In fact, when Israel enters into the time of Jacob's trouble, as Jeremiah said in verse 30:37, we read of a period of unprecedented oppression for Israel. The context describes her final restoration, just before Messiah returns. And all of that is described in great detail in the book of Revelation.

Jesus indicates in Matthew 13 and 24 that the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel's prophecy is to be the template of the chronological sequence of the beginning of the birth pangs, all of which correlate with the seal judgments in Revelation 5-6. The first four seal judgments in the book of Revelation fit within the first half of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week prophecy, and coincide with the temple's desecration, the abomination of desolation. We read about that in Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14. All of that is the midpoint of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week. Then the fifth seal in John's vision in Revelation stretches from the first into the second half, that time called the "great tribulation" according to Revelation 17, which lasts 3½ years according to Revelation 11:2, 12:6 and 13:5. Then the sixth and the seventh seals take place during the great tribulation. In fact, the seventh seal judgment really contains the seven trumpet judgments, and the seventh trumpet judgment contains the seven bowl judgments.

The point is that this is a time that is articulated in the context of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week, relating to the Jewish people, the nation of Israel, not to the Church. That whole period of time, some have rightly said, have sort of a terrestrial focus. But these horrific catastrophes that are described in the prophetic literature intensify in this birthing process, as we see in Matthew 24:16-26, which correlates with Revelation 7:19. We move from a terrestrial focus to a celestial focus, ultimately climaxing in the Messiah's return to earth in judgment. All of that fits into the last half of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week, concluding with the destruction of the one who desecrates the temple, "the prince who is to come," the Antichrist, according to Daniel 9:26.

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All of these amazing prophecies of Jesus and of Revelation and the Old Testament pertain to a future time of tribulation, primarily with respect to the people who are alive during that time, especially the Jews. In my humble opinion, it's only a tortured interpretation of these texts that can make these somehow fit into the historical facts of A.D. 70. I simply don't see it.

A fourth reason why I believe these things apply to a time yet future, a future beyond A.D. 70, is simply because nothing compares to the scope and severity of these staggering events, not to mention the sequence of events. In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 24:21, "There will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved" (Matthew 24:21-22a). That cannot be referring to something that happened in A.D. 70, for even though that was a horrendous time, there have been times that have been far worse than that. And, the severity and scope, not to mention the sequence of the prophecies yet to come is far greater than anything we could even imagine which has occurred thus far.

A fifth reason I believe that this is beyond A.D. 70 is that Jesus describes wars between numerous nations and numerous kingdoms. Not one nation, i.e.: Rome, against a captive Israeli people. It's far beyond that. A sixth reason is that in verse 7 Jesus describes how there will be, in various places, famines and earthquakes. That simply does not fit the historical facts of what took place in A.D. 70. A seventh reason is that Jesus describes a time in which there will be many who will claim to be the Messiah. Dear friends, there is no historical evidence of anything like that even remotely happening until A.D. 135 when a man by the name of Simon Bar-Kokhba claimed to be the Messiah.

An eighth reason why I believe that what Jesus is predicting is beyond A.D. 70 is that in Matthew 24:13-14 Jesus speaks of believers enduring birth pains to the end. Obviously that could not have referred to the disciples as they did not live to the end of the age. And it can't refer to believers, because the believers are going to be raptured before the end of the age, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:17. So these events can only apply to those who come to faith in Christ during the tribulation, whose faith is therefore proven by their endurance to the end.

Finally, a ninth reason is that in verse 14 Jesus describes a time of global evangelism. We see this also in Revelation 14:6-7, a time where, in a miraculous way, even an angel preaches the gospel, John tells us, "to every nation and tribe and tongue and people." And again nothing like that happened in A.D. 70. If I can once again remind you, be very careful. Don't replace Israel with the Church. One of the leading proponents of the preterist position, David Chilton, teaches that, "ethnic Israel was excommunicated for its apostasy and will never again be God's Kingdom." I simply do not see that in Scripture. If Israel's restoration and future salvation, which is clearly described in Romans 11:25-27, if all of that has been abrogated, then God must also renege on His promise to *bless the world through them* which you find in Romans 11:12, in fulfillment to the Abrahamic covenant which you see in Genesis 12:3. So there are many problems when people claim that God is finished with Israel.

Beloved, I believe that we must maintain a distinction between Israel and the Church. God's promises to Israel are not somehow being fulfilled in a spiritual way to the Church because somehow we are more deserving. That would violate the principles of sovereign grace. That view, in my mind, is not consistent with a literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic. Yet, many people say that God has no future for Israel. According to 1 Samuel 12:22, God spoke through Samuel and said, "The Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you His

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people” (NKJV). God redeemed His people even out of Egypt, redeemed them for Himself, and in light of that David wrote in 2 Samuel 7:24, “For You have made Your people Israel Your very own people forever; and You, LORD have become their God” (NKJV). And Jeremiah reminds us in Jeremiah 30:11, “‘For I am with you,’ declares the Lord, ‘to save you; For I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you, Only I will not destroy you completely. But I will chasten you justly, and will by no means leave you unpunished.’”

Let's look at these six signs that Jesus gives us. Let me first read the entire text so you get the flow, as Jesus answers the second half of their question in verse 3. Beginning in Matthew 24:4, “And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, *I am the Christ*, and will mislead many. And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.’”

The first sign in verses 4-5 is false messiahs, a time of great deception leading to the worship of the ultimate false messiah: the Antichrist. Jesus says to them, “See to it,” which in the original language means “Keep your eyes wide open,” speaking to those who will live in that generation of that day. Keep your eyes wide open, be vigilant, beware. Of what? “That no one misleads you. For many will come in My name saying ‘I am the Christ’ and will mislead many.” Certainly there have been false messiahs all throughout history. There were false messiahs before Jesus' time, and after His time. History records a gradual increase, as I have seen it, but nothing like the number that will occur that will rise up before Jesus comes. And certainly the influence that the false messiahs will have before Jesus comes will be far greater than anything we've seen today.

We've seen cultic personalities in the past, men like Karl Marx and Adolf Hitler. I think of the self-proclaimed messiahs in our recent history, like Jim Jones. Back in 1978 he convinced 913 followers to commit suicide at the People's Temple in Jonestown in Guyana. They were told to drink punch laced with cyanide, and they did it. I remember in even more recent history David Koresh with the Branch Dividians. He claimed to be God incarnate. And in 1993 do you remember the scene on television of a federal raid upon their compound in Texas where 74 people died? In 1997 there was the homosexual who claimed to be Jesus, Son of God, by the name of Marshall Applewhite. He had 39 followers in the movement he called Heaven's Gate. They drank Phenobarbital mixed with vodka, a nice little cocktail. And it killed them. They committed mass suicide. They believed that there was a spacecraft that was going to come and take them to a higher plane.

Even today, false teachers—a little bit different than false messiahs—dominate the religious landscape. Not all of them claim to be the Messiah, but they certainly have a god complex. The gullibility of people today is utterly pandemic. I think of young men that would blow themselves up because they believe that Allah wants them to do so. I think of the thousands of charlatans that promise health and wealth to the people that are clamoring after them, people that clamor after every imaginable

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evangelical fad that comes around. You see that with the Prayer of Jabez, the Purpose Driven Life, and now that will begin to fizzle here before long and there will be another one.

People today are confused, scared, desperate and ignorant. Many people with college and even seminary educations are ignorant of what the Scriptures teach. Imagine how vulnerable people are to the religious predators that are out there today. Imagine what it will be like when the Church is raptured, snatched away; when the moral and spiritual influence of the body of Christ is gone; when there's no more salt, no more light, only decay and darkness; when there's nothing left to restrain immorality and corruption; when the ACLU and the leftists, liberals, and Hollywood can have their way without opposition; when the homosexuals can rule the day. It will be a time of unbridled wickedness, and it will spread like the toxic waste of a nuclear fallout.

When that happens, people will live in utter horror. It will be like living in a horror movie. The suffering will be unbearable, as we will see, as we look at the prophetic literature. All of the events will cause people to cry out, according to Revelation 6:16, cry out for, "the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from...the wrath of the Lamb.'" That's how bad it will get. Moreover, imagine how much worse it will be when the restraining power of the Holy Spirit is taken away as we read in 2 Thessalonians 2. "Taken away" which means literally that He steps aside. In 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 we read, "The mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way (steps aside) And then that lawless one will be revealed." Today the spirit of lawlessness is rampant in our world, but it is still a mystery. It hasn't been fully revealed, and it won't be until the Antichrist, who is the embodiment of lawlessness, is revealed in the tribulation and reigns for 42 months, according to Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 13:5.

The world's institutions, even today, are gradually disintegrating. Look at what's happening to the institution of marriage, the institution of the family. Look at our systems: our educational system, our healthcare system; even our governments. Eventually they are all going to collapse. When all of that happens, this place will be an unbearable place to live. You will see moral and social anarchy. And not only will the institutions disintegrate, but as we read the prophetic literature, the whole planet will begin to disintegrate. This will be an environmentalist's worst nightmare. As you look at the prophetic literature you will see there will be earthquakes, famines, pestilence, war, cosmic disturbances, the vegetation is going to be burned up, a third of the creatures of the saltwater will be destroyed, a third of the ships destroyed, the fresh waters will be made bitter, and on and on it goes. Remember the lawlessness that we saw at the end of hurricane Katrina? Think of that on a global scale.

Wherever you find desperate people, you will find opportunistic predators to prey upon them. This is always the very heart of cults. They look for desperate people, offering them something that they could never deliver, all so that they can gain a following. This will be the mindset of the false messiahs in the day when people are desperate beyond anything that we can imagine. And please understand that the removal of the Church, combined with the escalating disasters, will predispose people to follow every imaginable diabolical cult and leader. We see that today. People are so prone to that. In their desperation and spiritual blindness, they will ultimately bow to the quintessential deceiver, the Antichrist himself, Satan's messiah.

This messiah is the one that Daniel describes in chapter 8:23 as "Insolent and skilled in intrigue. And his power will be mighty, but not by his own power, he will destroy to an extraordinary degree And prosper and perform his will; He will destroy mighty men and the holy people. And through his

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shrewdness, He will cause deceit to succeed by his influence.” In Daniel 11:36, “He will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods; And he will prosper until the indignation is finished, for that which is decreed will be done.” The apostle Paul describes him in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 as “the man of lawlessness” and “the son of destruction.” In Revelation 11 and 13 he is described as “the beast.”

As we see these six signs, not only do we see Jesus speaking of the danger of deceptive false messiahs, but secondly, nations at war. In verse 6 through the first part of verse 7, “And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars.” The grammar in the original language would indicate that this is referring to people that are constantly hearing of actual wars and impending wars. It's not too different than what we have today, but it's going to get much worse. He goes on to say, “See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end” or the *telos*. That word is very important here. It's not the ultimate end, in other words, Jesus is saying that's not going to be the ultimate end of the age when all conflicts will cease, there's going to be more to come. Again this is the beginning of birth pangs, of nations at war. He goes on to say in verse 7, “for nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.”

We already see the stage set for escalating violence and nations at war in our day. If you listen to the news at all, you realize very quickly that most of the world hates the United States of America and it's getting worse. In fact, the pundits and politicians are frequently expressing their concern, their growing fear of Russia and China and North Korea and the Arab/Islamic nations, and even South America now. In fact, imperialistic Russia, today, is a wounded bear, but it is gaining strength. Recently Russia canceled Syria's \$10 billion debt in a formal declaration, becoming their ally. When that happened you may remember that Israel's prime minister Ariel Sharon protested to Moscow when they agreed to sell advanced missiles to Syria. Of course all of his protests fell on deaf ears. Russia continues to assist Iran in its development of its nuclear program. Is it any wonder that when the Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas came into power that the first thing he did was go to Moscow to establish that relationship. He needs an ally to annihilate Israel.

If we look at the prophetic literature we see Ezekiel 38 where we read a very detailed description of a coalition of nations that will come upon Jerusalem at the end of the tribulation. I believe it to be synonymous with the battle of Armageddon, and when you read those nations you will see clearly that it speaks of Russia along with numerous other Muslim nations that are within that old Soviet Union constellation of nations. It also includes the nations of Iran, Libya, Egypt, Ethiopia, Armenia, and even Turkey. Wars and rumors of wars. Nations rising against nations. Kingdoms against kingdoms.

Even as we look at the current political and moral climate, especially in Russia, we see that these scenarios seem almost inevitable, and even people that do not believe the prophetic literature would agree that things are moving towards a very, very dangerous time. In the magazine Israel My Glory, one that I would encourage you all to get and read, there is an article called “The Emerging Shadows of the Hammer and Sickle” by Elwood McQuaid. Here's what he had to say. “On January 13, 2005, 20 members of Russia's Duma (the lower house of parliament) sent a letter to the prosecutor general asking him to investigate their allegations and, if confirmed, to initiate proceedings prohibiting all religious and ethnic Jewish organizations in Russia, branding them as ‘extremist’...Evangelical Christians in Russia and some of the commonwealth states are also feeling the heat. It is no secret that the Russian Orthodox hierarchy is in a huff over the giant inroads Bible-believing Christians are making among a spiritually emaciated people long stifled by the sterile formalism of the Orthodox

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system. Consequently, the Russian Orthodox have forged alliances with some of Russia's most radical political groups, branding evangelicals as cultists who prey on unsuspecting citizens."

It's easy to see that there are numerous powder kegs around the world ready to explode. The world is inexorably moving toward unprecedented conflict, not toward peace. We learn more about this in the parallel accounts in Revelation 5:1-7, where we read how God the Father hands Jesus Christ, the Son, a scroll, which would be the imagery of the title deed to the universe. It's sealed seven times, which was customary for titles such as that, even in the Roman laws of that day. Beginning in chapter 6 of Revelation, we read how Christ begins to unroll the scroll with its seven seals, each of which represent a specific divine judgment that will be sequentially discharged upon the earth.

In Daniel's prophecy we get further insight into the conflicts of that coming day. In Daniel 9:27 we read how Israel is one day going to make a covenant with the Antichrist, believing his lies, believing the phony peace that the world is beginning to experience at some level. They will be deceived by his promises to protect them. In Daniel 7:24 we read how the Antichrist in that day will rule a massive kingdom that basically compromises the old Roman Empire. It's a fascinating prophetic passage. A western confederacy of a unified Europe. Daniel describes that as a ten-nation empire. Now, I want to be careful whenever we get beyond what the text says, but this could very well refer to the current European Common Market. I don't know for sure, but it could be.

Then in Daniel 11:40, we see that both the near and future prophecies are juxtaposed together, where you see historical facts of both being presented. The near prophecies in Daniel 11 were fulfilled in the Persian kingdom and the reign of Greece through Antiochus Epiphanes, and the future prophecies move us way on beyond, all the way to the time of the Antichrist. In light of that, here's what Daniel says about that time, that future day. "At the end time the king of the South will collide with him (the Antichrist) and the king of the North will storm against him with chariots, (this is likely a Russian-Arab alliance) with horsemen, and with many ships; and he will enter countries, overflow them, and pass through. He will also enter the Beautiful Land, and many countries will fall; but these will be rescued out of his hand: Edom, Moab and the foremost of the sons of Ammon. Then he will stretch out his hand against other countries, and the land of Egypt will not escape. But he will gain control over the hidden treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; and Libyans and Ethiopians will follow at his heels." Evidently there is a temporary defeat of these nations, but we will see that the northern and eastern forces regroup and they rekindle the wrath of the Antichrist and he attacks them and he's going to be defeated.

In Daniel 11:44-45 we read some more of this, "But rumors from the East," let me stop there. It's interesting that in Revelation 9:14-16, there is a description of an eastern army of 200 million that will come and destroy one third of the remaining inhabitants of the earth. Even now there is an army greater than that, over 200 million, in the East, the army of China. But Daniel describes "...rumors from the East and from the North will disturb him (referring to the Antichrist), and he will go forth with great wrath to destroy and annihilate many. And he will pitch the tents of his royal pavilion between the seas and the beautiful Holy Mountain; (between the Mediterranean and the Dead Seas and Mount Zion in the land of Israel) the text goes on to say, "yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him."

We see this described as well in Revelation 19:19-21 in the battle of Armageddon, that pinnacle of the day of the Lord when Antichrist is defeated, when Jesus Christ comes with His saints and executes all

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of the kings of the earth and their armies. My point is to say that there is a day that is coming when there will be conflict that is beyond anything we could ever conceive.

Russia to the north, confederated Europe to the west, Africa to the south, Asia to the east, all of them converge upon the tiny land of Israel. And you tell me that somehow God is finished with those people? It is the most fought over and fought on piece of real estate in the world. It's an amazing thought. And they're all going to be destroyed. Zechariah 14:2 we read about a prophecy. As I read this try to imagine all of this fitting into what happened in A.D. 70. "The LORD will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on the day of battle." Now that's a wonderful, glorious hope of a coming day, but none of that happened in A.D. 70.

Bottom line: conflicts will only increase in severity and scope, just before the Lord comes again the second time in power and great glory. No one, regardless of where they live, will be exempt from these worldwide conflicts. In Matthew 24:6, isn't it interesting, there in the middle of the verse He says, "See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place." Aren't those wonderful words of encouragement for the people living in that day, those tribulation saints? He's saying, "Yes, these things are going to happen, but don't lose hope. Don't think that I'm no longer on My throne. I'm still a sovereign God. I am in control. I'll be there soon."

Jesus speaks not only of false messiahs and nations at war, but the next birth pang of natural disasters of epic proportions. At the end of verse 7 through verse 8 he says, "and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs." In order to get more details of this we can go to Revelation 6:8, where we read how Christ will break the fourth seal of the scroll. Here's what we read that parallels what Jesus is saying in Matthew. It says, "And I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. And authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth."

This is a macabre scene, a horrifying scene, something beyond anything I can conceive. In the imagery of coming judgment we read of this ashen horse. Ashen in the original language is *chloros*. We get our word chlorophyll or chlorine from that. It refers to a pale color, a yellowish-green color, the color of sickness. The color of a corpse that is rotting. It's also the color that is used to describe the blanched appearance of a person who has been struck with paralyzing fear. I've seen that before. Here's what's going on. Global war will lead to famine, especially if there is nuclear war. Here John sees Hades, the grave, following after this ashen horse mounted by death. He sees the sword and famine and pestilence. Many times when you see those in the Old Testament they are in the same context, and naturally all of this will lead to death.

Pestilence in the original language is *thanatos*, translated "death," but also it is used to describe and encompass events far beyond just that of death. It is used to describe natural disasters, things like famines and earthquakes that Jesus has predicted. And obviously the many diseases that will inevitably accompany such cataclysmic events. Whenever we have seen great wars, and the many corpses from whatever has happened—whether it be a famine or a war—one of the greatest killers is typhus. It's been one of the greatest killers throughout history.



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There were more casualties in the Civil War due to disease than from battle. This will be a time of great pestilence. The great influenza epidemic of 1918-19 killed 30 million people. Wherever there are corpses, famine, wide scale natural disasters and disease as described here, especially under the concept of pestilence, you are also going to have something else: wild beasts.

I tried to do a lot of research on this term, *therion*, wild beasts in the original language. It can literally mean an animal living wild, and it can refer to many kinds of wild animals. Maybe it will be carnivores that are starving for a meal, we don't know for sure, but it can also be found in other Greek literature referring to birds and even insects. I don't want to push this too far or sensationalize this, but it is a tenable hypothesis to assume that this can mean more than just wild animals like wolves and coyotes. If it had some kind of reference to different types of insects, think of the disease that is born by mosquitoes.

The Mayo Clinic estimates that malaria is responsible for killing 2.7 million people every year. It could refer to some kind of birds. Even now we have a great fear of a bird flu epidemic. Imagine a time when hospitals are pretty much in shambles, we have no more resources to supply clinics and physicians with needed drugs—all of that is interrupted or cut off completely. It's going to be a horrific time for the people of that day. But the wild animals could refer especially to one little rodent that we're all familiar with, and that's the rat. We know that rats thrive in highly populated areas, and they are notorious throughout history for spreading disease. In fact in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, rats were responsible for the spread of the bubonic plague which wiped out one fourth and some say as much as one third of all of Europe. It was called the Black Death.

We don't know all of the specifics, but we do know that it will be a horrible time, an inconceivable time. Think of this, this is just the fourth seal in Revelation 8, and the third birth pang of Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 24. By the time the Lamb breaks all of the seals, and the trumpet and bowl judgments have been poured out on the earth, the planet as we know it will cease to exist. Those who refuse to repent will be in such unspeakable torment that they will, according to Revelation 9:6, "Seek death and will not find it; and they will long to die and death flees from them." In Revelation 16:10 God tells us that these people will "gnaw their tongues because of pain." Nothing of this severity, scope, or sequence happened at the fall of Jerusalem. And to think that Jesus said in verse 8 that all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.

Beloved, may we all rejoice in the comforting promise that Paul gave the Thessalonian believers in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-9 when he said, "Let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." (NKJV)

I would like to close by reminding you again that we serve a holy God, a sovereign God who is merciful and gracious, but He will not let sin go unpunished. We can rejoice that all He has promised will come to fruition. My mind went to a hymn by Charles Wesley written in 1758 called "Lo! He Comes, With Clouds Descending." This is what singing great hymns should do when you are reading the Word of God, it should stimulate your heart to think of the great hymns of the faith. Likewise when you are singing the great hymns of the faith it should help reinforce the eternal truths that we find in the infallible record of the Word of God. That's why hymns are so important. As I was pouring myself into these amazing prophecies and rejoicing in the sovereign God that I love, here's what it says:

## Christ's Greatest Prophetic Discourse Part 2 of 8

Lo! He comes, with clouds descending, once for favored sinners slain;  
Thousand thousand saints attending swell the triumph of his train;  
Alleluia! Alleluia! God appears on earth to reign.

Ev'ry eye shall now behold him, robed in dreadful majesty;  
Those who set at naught and sold him, pierced, and nailed him to the tree,  
Deeply wailing, deeply wailing, shall the true Messiah see.

Yea, amen! Let all adore thee, high on thine eternal throne;  
Savior, take the pow'r and glory, claim the kingdom for thine own;  
O come quickly; O come quickly; alleluia! Come, Lord, come.

[All Scripture quotations are NASB unless otherwise noted.]

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