

Session 7 The Big Picture: Three Time Frames in the End Times

I. REVIEW

- A. Many today neglect the subject of the biblical signs of the times, despite Jesus emphasizing the need to discern and recognize the times (Mt. 16:1-4; 24:32-44; Lk. 19:41-44; 21:34-36). Jesus, the apostles, and the Old Testament prophets prophesied both event and trend signs in the end times. Most of the trends that will *come in fullness* at the time of Jesus' return are *occurring now*.
- B. Jesus' most complete teaching on the end times is in Matthew 24-25 (also Mk. 13; Lk. 17; 21). Jesus prophesied the distress of Jerusalem both in AD 70 *and* at the end of the age in one prophecy. Some focus on one of these two time frames to the exclusion of the other. The distress of Jerusalem in AD 70 is a prophetic picture of the pressure Jerusalem will face in the generation Jesus returns.
- C. We ask the Spirit for wisdom about what to do specifically to bring His power and blessing to bear upon each of the trends related to the end-of-the-age birth pangs that impact the cities we pray for. We expose and resist the negatives by intercession, proclamation, and actions in the opposite spirit.

II. THREE PROPHETIC TIME FRAMES IN THE END TIMES

- A. We will better understand the birth pangs by understanding the three prophetic time frames in the end times. They gave us insight into the general sequence of what is coming.
- B. Scripture speaks of a time frame that is called the "*beginning of birth pains*" (Mt. 24:8, NIV). The Greek word is translated as *birth pains* (NIV) or *sorrows* (NKJV). It is to be compared with the increasing pain a woman experiences in childbirth. There is great pain, but the joy of bringing forth a new baby makes it worth the pain (Jn. 16:21). The Bible uses the metaphor of the birthing process to describe events that will lead up to the coming of the millennial kingdom (Mt. 24:8; cf. Jer. 30:5-7). The anguish in the end times will result in a new world order being birthed at the Millennium.
⁶"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars...⁷Nation will rise against nation...There will be famines and earthquakes...⁸All these are the beginning of birth pains." (Mt. 24:8, NIV)
⁶"Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor...? ⁷Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it." (Jer. 30:5-7)
- C. Jesus spoke of three distinct time frames in the end times. We can see this clearly by comparing Matthew 24 with 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 and Daniel 9:27. The first time frame is related to the *beginning of birth pains*, which occurs over a generation leading up to the final seven years of this age, which in turn is made up of two distinct periods, each lasting 3½ years.
 - 1. ***Beginning of birth pains*** (Mt. 24:4-8; Mk. 13:5-8; Lk 21:8-11)—leading to the final 7 years
 - 2. ***Counterfeit world peace*** (increased labor pains)—the first 3½ years of the final 7 years
 - 3. ***The Great Tribulation*** (hard labor pains)—the last 3½ years of the final 7 years

III. THE FIRST TIME FRAME: THE BEGINNING OF BIRTH PANGS (MT. 24:4-8)

- A. The beginning of birth pains will be felt by a generation just before the final 7-year period starts. Israel is the timepiece for God’s prophetic plans—the reference point for understanding redemptive history. Therefore, my opinion is that the beginning of birth pains may have started either in 1948 when Israel became a nation or in 1967 when Jerusalem was reunited under Israeli rule.
- B. This earth will transition to the age to come in the context of God shaking all nations (Hag. 2:6-8). This shaking is comparable to labor contractions, which indicate that the birth process has begun.
⁶***“I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; ⁷and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations [Jesus], ...I will fill this temple with glory.” (Hag. 2:6-7)***
- C. Believers are to recognize the birth pangs, which mark the generation of Jesus’ return (Lk. 21:28, 32). The end-time distress of nations will have a clear beginning, will increase in intensity over a generation, and culminate at His return. A generation may last up to 100 years (Gen. 15:13-16).
²⁵***“There will be...on the earth distress of nations...²⁶men’s hearts failing them from fear...
²⁸When these things begin to happen...lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near...
³²this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place...” (Lk. 21:25-32)***
³³***“When you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! ³⁴Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.” (Mt. 24:33-34)***

IV. THE SECOND TIME FRAME: COUNTERFEIT WORLD PEACE

- A. The second time frame in the end times will be a time of *counterfeit worldwide peace and safety*. It will come just before the third time frame (Great Tribulation) and will continue through the first 3½ years of the final 7 years of this age. This period begins with the Antichrist appearing as a man of peace who will solve many international conflicts, establishing world peace (1 Thes. 5:3).
³***When they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains [Great Tribulation] upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. (1 Thes. 5:3)***
1. Paul uses “they” to refer to unbelievers in the nations who will rejoice because they think that the time of world peace has arrived, but who will not escape destruction.
 2. **Peace:** After the beginning of the birth pains—a season of war, civil strife, and terrorism—there will be a temporary season of world peace, which will last only 3½ years,
 3. **Safety:** There will be some reprieve in wars, terrorism, famine, economic crisis, disease, etc.
- B. When the prophetic Church proclaims this period as being a *counterfeit* peace under the leadership of a demonized man (Antichrist), they will appear absurd and even dangerous.
- C. A global crisis will result from the trends associated with the beginning of birth pains, and this will provide the Antichrist with an opportunity to take control of many governments as he appears to bring solutions. Terrorism causes people to see security as more important than personal privacy.

- D. How will this temporary peace be established? The angel Gabriel showed Daniel that the Antichrist will make a covenant with many nations (Dan. 9:27). Establishing a political covenant with many, i.e., Israel and other nations, will “guarantee” political stability and personal safety. It will involve peace treaties with many nations.

²⁷***“Then he [Antichrist] shall confirm a covenant with many [nations and Israel] for one week [7 years]; but in the middle of the week [3½ years] he shall bring an end to sacrifice [in the Jerusalem temple]...and on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate.” (Dan. 9:27)***

- E. The final 7 years of this age will begin when the Antichrist makes a covenant with Israel and many nations, bringing in world peace that will last for only 3½ years. The peace will be destroyed when the Antichrist breaks covenant with Israel and the nations by setting up the abomination of desolation (Mt. 24:15), indicating the start of the Great Tribulation that will continue for 3½ years.
- F. This peace treaty will end the first prophetic time frame, called the beginning of birth pangs, in which the nations of the world will fight against each other (Mt. 24:7-8).
- G. The Antichrist will appear to answer very complex, unsolvable problems by his skillful leadership.
- H. Israel will have a season of peace until they are attacked by the Antichrist (Ezek. 38:8-12). The very man who seemingly brought them peace will be the one who will invade them. Ezekiel speaks of Israel’s time of peace and safety at that time in terms of them having no walls, or military security.
- ⁸***“In the latter years you [Antichrist] will come into the land [Israel] of those...gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely...¹⁰On that day...you will make an evil plan...¹¹You will say, ‘I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls...’¹²to stretch out your hand against... people [Israel] gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods.” (Ezek. 38:8-12)***
- I. The leaders in Jerusalem, along with the leaders of Gentile nations, will make a covenant with the Antichrist in the end times (Isa. 28:14-18; Dan. 9:27; Ezek. 38:8-14; 39:26; Jn. 5:43; 1 Thes. 5:3).
- ¹⁴***Hear the word of the LORD, you scornful men (leaders of end-time Israel), who rule this people who are in Jerusalem,¹⁵because you have said, “We have made a covenant with death...when the overflowing scourge [of the Antichrist] passes through, it will not come to us, for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood we have hidden ourselves”...¹⁸Your covenant with death will be annulled (Antichrist will betray his promises), and...when the overflowing scourge passes through, then you will be trampled down by it. (Isa. 28:14-18)***
- J. With peace established between Israel and Islamic nations, they will have a new common enemy—the Church. Why? Because the Church will expose Satan’s role in the counterfeit world peace. Imagine how hard it will be for unbelievers to understand this. For the first time the world will be at peace. The Church will be viewed as fanatical, extreme, and even as dangerous to world peace.
- K. At this time the harlot Babylon religion will persecute the Church (Rev. 17:2-6), leading to many falling away (1 Tim. 4:1). The world will be offended by Jesus and His standards of “intolerance,” which will be promoted by the praying Church.

- L. Some believers will rationalize the need to collaborate with the Antichrist’s regime. This will open the door for betrayal in close relationships. Offenses will abound and escalate into hate.
- M. The Church must take a stand against the Antichrist, knowing that this seemingly brilliant and dignified world leader will eventually demand to be worshiped as God.
- N. Many will be brought to a false sense of security, called “a spirit of slumber.” Jesus and the apostles likened it to sleeping, rather than having a lifestyle of watching with prophetic discernment.
- O. Unbelievers will rejoice in seeing peace and safety seemingly established. But it will be a time of persecution for the Church, because they will proclaim the time of peace as the work of the devil, which will enrage many. It will be a time of increased birth pangs, marked by persecution.

⁹“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. ¹⁰And then many will be offended [by God and Christians], will betray one another, and will hate one another.” (Mt. 24:9-10)

- P. The harlot Babylon religion will thrive during this period. This religion of tolerance will cause the nations to be drunk, or intoxicated, with joy over her promises, prosperity, tolerance, and seductions offering benefits that will include a unified religion (that ends war) and a prosperous economy.

²“The inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.” (Rev. 17:2)

- Q. The harlot religion will have great prominence. It will be arrayed in purple (royal status) and respected by the elite financial leaders of the earth, who will give their allegiance to her. But the harlot Babylon will cause multitudes to be intoxicated with the blood of the saints who expose her.

⁴The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet [royalty], and adorned with gold...having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication...⁶I saw the woman [harlot Babylon], drunk with the blood of the saints and...the martyrs of Jesus. (Rev. 17:4-6)

- R. Jesus described them as being occupied with eating, drinking, and marrying, as in the days of Noah. In other words, it will be a temporary period of economic, social, and military peace. Notice that in this time frame there are no wars or economic crises, as described in the beginning of birth pangs.

³⁷“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ³⁸For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark.” (Mt. 24:37-38)

V. THE THIRD TIME FRAME: GREAT TRIBULATION

- A. The third time frame in the end times will be *Great Tribulation*—the heavy labor pains (the final 3½ years of this age; Mt. 24:15-31; Rev. 6-19). It begins with the abomination of desolation.

¹⁵“When you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place...¹⁶let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains...²¹For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. ²²And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved.” (Mt. 24:15-22)

- B. The final stage of labor will be the **most troubling** time in human history. This is the 3½ year time frame of “hard labor,” in which the pain will be the worst for everyone. Jesus indicated that if those days were any longer than 3½ years, then no flesh would physically survive it (Mt. 24:22).
- C. During this time, the Antichrist will openly show his hostility without needing to deceive unbelievers. He will not hide his cruelty or wickedness in the final 3½ years of natural history before Jesus returns. He will require all to worship him and will ban all other religions.

VI. SUMMARY OF THE THREE TIME FRAMES IN THE END TIMES

- A. **Beginning of birth pains:** These occur over a generation leading to the final seven years of this age. ⁷*“For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes...”*⁸*All these are the beginning of sorrows.”* (Mt. 24:7-8)
- B. The second time frame in the end times will be a time of *counterfeit worldwide peace and safety*. It will be the first 3½ years of the final 7 years of this age, just *before* the Great Tribulation. ³*When they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains [Great Tribulation] upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.* (1 Thes. 5:2-3)
⁹*“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. ¹⁰And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. ¹¹Then many false prophets will rise up... ¹²lawlessness will abound.”* (Mt. 24:9-12)
- C. The third time frame in the end times will be *Great Tribulation* in the final 3½ years of this age. ²¹*“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time... ²²And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved.”* (Mt. 24:21-22)

VII. SUMMARY OF THE BIRTH PAINS: 15 SIGN TRENDS

- A. Jesus identified *10 trends* as the *beginning of birth pains* (Mt. 24:4-8; Mk. 13:5-8, Lk. 21:8-11). Matthew mentioned 7 trends and Luke added 3 more—“commotions” (21:9), “fearful sights,” which includes great signs from heaven, and “perplexity at the roaring...of the sea” (Lk. 21:11, 25). ⁵*“For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. ⁶And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled... ⁷For nation will rise against nation [ethnic conflict], and kingdom against kingdom [economic warfare]. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes... ⁸All these are the beginning of sorrows.”* (Mt. 24:4-8)
⁹*“But when you hear of wars and commotions... ¹¹And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven ... ²⁵And...on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring.”* (Lk. 21:9-11, 25)

B. *Ten trends* associated with the beginning of birth pains, increasing over a generation.

1. *Deception and false christs*: Many will come in Jesus' name and will deceive many (Mt. 24:5).
2. *Wars*: There will be military and political conflict (Mt. 24:6; Mk. 13:7; Lk. 21:9).
3. *Ethnic conflict*: Civil disorder and racism occur as nation (*ethnos*) rises against nation (Mt. 24:7)
4. *Economic warfare*: There will be economic related hostility, aggression, and conflict (Mt. 24:7).
5. *Famines*: Massive food shortages will occur (Mt. 24:7).
6. *Pestilences (disease)*: The horrors of biological warfare will bring disease to a new intensity.
7. *Great earthquakes*: Earthquakes will be great in terms of destruction and loss of life (Lk. 21:11).
8. *Commutations*: chaotic events in society and creation (Lk. 21:9)
9. *Fearful sights as great signs from heaven*: Signs in the sky and related to the weather (Lk 21:11).
10. *Perplexity at the roaring of the sea* (Lk. 21:25)

Luke 21 identifies 10 trends, without calling them the beginning of birth pangs. Luke mentioned the 7 trends from Matthew 24 and added three: *commutations* (21:9), *fearful sights as great signs* (21:11), and *perplexity at the roaring of the sea* (21:25).

C. Jesus identified *five trends* that will increase during the final 7 years (after the beginning of pains).

⁹***“They will...kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. ¹⁰And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. ¹¹Then many false prophets will rise up...¹²And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”***
(Mt. 24:9-12)

1. *Persecution* (Mt. 24:9)
2. *Social anarchy* as hatred dominates society (Mt. 24:10)
3. *False prophets* (Mt. 24:11)
4. *Lawlessness abounding* (Mt. 24:12)
5. *Love growing cold* (Mt. 24:12) as people suffer the darkness of a seared conscience (1 Tim. 4:2).

D. God’s people must be strengthened so that they escape the snare of fear and lust to stand in victory (Lk. 21:36). Both Jesus and Paul emphasized the call to *watch*, in the context of describing pressure in the end times (Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:9, 33, 34, 35, 37; Lk. 21:36; Rev. 16:15; cf. 1 Thes. 5:6).

⁴²***“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.”*** (Mt. 24:42)

³⁶***“Watch...and pray always that you may be counted worthy [have strength] to escape all these things...and to stand [in victory] before the Son of Man.”*** (Lk. 21:34-36)

E. ***Watch***: We are to grow in understanding by watching the biblical signs of the times unfold. As our understanding increases, it produces greater urgency in us. By *watching* what the prophetic scriptures say about the end-time distress in the nations, people can see prophecy progressively unfolding before them. As they watch, they inevitably talk about what is occurring and how it lines up with biblical prophecy. Thus they will connect with more people who have a common urgency.