



Merely Birth Pangs

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. 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.

Matthew 24:4-8 (NASB)

*Nearly every day I get yet another email or link to an article not just dissecting current events but attempting to directly tie them to biblical prophecy. To be sure there are certain milestones in Scripture which we will be unable to ignore when they are fulfilled, but when it comes to prophecy that is **ALL** we've been given – milestones. Most of the details between them are omitted and for a very sound, biblical reason: for believers it is not a test of knowledge, but faith.*

I subscribe to the school of thought that if you want to know more about the Second Coming, learn all you can about the First Coming. In both cases a one-world ruler will be in charge "marking" (or in the case of His First Coming taking a census of) his subjects. Apostasy and deception are so rampant that even when the signs in heaven appear, the religious authorities can explain what they're supposed to mean but can't see them for themselves and don't respond. But one of the greatest lessons to be gleaned from Christ's First Coming that teaches something about His Second is to study those few individuals who **DID** recognize His coming.

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In hindsight biblical scholars can now point to more than 300 Old Testament prophecies which Jesus specifically fulfilled at His First Coming. Have you ever wondered why almost nobody figured that out **WHILE** He was here the first time? It's not zero, but there are very few who got it. A good example is Nicodemus.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

John 3:1-2 (NASB)

What Nicodemus is very politely saying is, "Some of us are very confused because if You're the Messiah, You're not exactly what we expected." You see, they had the milestones – the basic plot points provided by God throughout Scripture which they treated as a completed whole. In reality, it was just a basic framework; but they filled in the gaps with their own imagination to construct what they believed the Messiah to be rather than trusting that God was giving just enough information so they could recognize Him by faith. By filling in the gaps themselves they came up with a picture of the Messiah they **wanted** rather than the One God **promised** and many, therefore, could not "see" Him. He didn't fit their profile.

I think there's a very real parallel to the Second Coming and End Times prophecy. We are not given every detail, only the framework – the important milestones – by which we are to recognize by faith that God is fulfilling all He promised according to His Word and ways. But because of our tendency to "fill in the gaps" and our insistence on assigning specific events and personalities into the mix, many are coming up with pictures and scenarios which aren't really accurate. They're flunking the test of faith, so to speak.

One of my favorite examples to explain this is Moses at the burning bush. (Exodus 3) God doesn't tell Moses every single thing that is going to happen in advance, He only provides the basic milestones:

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- God has seen their affliction and is aware of their suffering. (Ex. 3:7)
- God has come to deliver them from the Egyptians. (Ex. 3:8)
- God is going to bring them to the Promised Land. (Ex. 3:8)
- Moses will represent God before Pharaoh. (Ex. 3:10)
- Moses will represent God before the Israelites. (Ex. 3:16-18)
- Pharaoh will resist God's will. (Ex. 3:19)
- God will perform miracles to accomplish these tasks. (Ex. 3:20)
- In the end Israel will peacefully plunder the Egyptians. (Ex. 3:21-22)

Now you're already familiar with the whole story as it completely unfolded. Did God do each of these things? Absolutely. But was this **ALL** God did? Absolutely not! God revealed to Moses the framework of what today we'd call an "8-point plan", but in between these things God did all kinds of things He never mentioned in advance to Moses. In fact at certain points, because it did not appear that everything was being fulfilled the way they thought it would be, many of them became discouraged, doubted, and even complained.

You see, the milestones are given that we might trust God during the intervals between them. Ultimately we have to trust that God will fulfill all of His Word in exactly the way **HE** has decided it should be fulfilled and not according to how we **WISH** it would come about.

So how will He do that?

Going back to our opening Scripture from the Olivet Discourse, it comes in waves, getting progressively worse. It will seem bad, then subside for awhile to the point that everyone may begin to think everything is alright. But the next "contraction" will come even stronger. They will start to come closer and closer together, gaining horrific strength each time.

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So what are we supposed to do? Do we map these things out and cross-reference every current event to a possible prophecy in Scripture? There are two things Jesus commands us – yes, **commands** us – to do: “*See to it that no one misleads you*” (Mt. 24:4) and “*See that you are not frightened*”. (Mt. 24:6)

This is what I fear is taking place within the church where believers are concerned, that there are so many attempting in earnest to “fill in the gaps” that ultimately the sheep are being misled and unduly frightened.

Both of these direct commands from Jesus are directly related to our faith. “*See to it that no one misleads you*” is a test of our trust in God’s Word and His Word alone, and “*See that you are not frightened*” is a test of trust in Him to fulfill the promises made to keep and deliver us regardless of what the circumstances may look like.

I’m not saying there should be no warnings sounded concerning the End Times or Christ’s imminent return, just pointing out how believers are supposed to live with such things. As believers we must not forget the overall commandment Jesus gave us concerning what to do when we see these things being fulfilled and taking place:

“But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Luke 21:28 (NASB)

Don’t be fooled, don’t be afraid, just stand up straight and look to Him because it’s all about to happen exactly the way **HE** planned it to happen.

In His Love,

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