

Matthew 24:1-28 & Matthew 25 **“Messianic Birth Pains”**

Lord Jesus, by your Word and Spirit, keep us, your faithful holy ones, free from deception, distractibility and despondency as we expectantly await your glorious Return as Judge. May your kingdom come and may your will be done in us as we cry ‘Come, Lord Jesus. Come’ for your glory and for our eternal rest in you, our Savior and King. AMEN.

So, we quickly and easily settled into the hospital room; playing a game of cards. Salina, in my opinion, was a trooper, as she experienced varying degrees of labor pains. Thomas was on his way. We had been preparing for this for months, yet we were still surprised at the timing and conditions under which Salina began to go into labor. Initially, I thought I was doing a pretty good job waiting with Salina in the hospital; talking to her, asking if she needed anything, and keeping her occupied and comfortable. When her birth pains intensified, she expressed increasing discomfort. In light of what I understood from the nursing staff in relation to the rapid progress of Salina’s labor, I thought she was managing the pain easily. Finally, there came the point when Salina had to decide if she wanted pain medications to help with her delivery. After that point, pain medications or an epidural would not be an option. In my helpfulness, I responded to the nurse, “Nah. She doesn’t need that. She’s fine.” By the look on Salina’s face, I realized that was not a very helpful intervention on my part. Salina’s pain level rapidly increased after that. Her doctor arrived and stated that Thomas was rapidly descending, but his shoulders were too wide to deliver him without some assistance and maneuvering by the physician. Recognizing the intensity of the situation, I did what came naturally; I told the doctor and the nurses I would be waiting outside the room while they took care of things. They could get me when it was all over. Again, not very helpful I must admit. The doctor had other plans for me. She told me to go to one of Salina’s legs and hold it to help her push for the delivery, which had to happen quickly. Not very pleasant for me...and I suppose not for Salina either. Needless to say, Thomas, although black and blue, was delivered safely and healthily. Within minutes after delivering, Salina was up in bed, even before she and the sheets were cleaned, eating a big greasy cheeseburger she ordered earlier with Thomas by her side. I had the picture to prove it.

Looking back, I was not as prepared as I could have been for Thomas’ coming. I also realize I could have done a better job waiting for him during

Salina's labor pains by not speaking of things I had no business commenting on and with a willingness to be helpful when the pain intensified, even if that meant forgetting my own discomfort to help others. Well...Jesus wants us to be prepared for His Second Coming, and there are ways He wants us, as His disciples, to be properly waiting for Him.

Last time, we looked at a chunk of Matthew 24 to learn that Christ's Second Coming will be Visible, Triumphant, and Sudden. However, prior to Jesus Return, there will be signs, events, throughout the world, that indicate His Return is still 'not yet' but imminent. These events describe the tribulation we will experience during these Last Days called "Messianic Birth Pains."

The imagery of birth, or labor, pains to illustrate the events preceding the Messiah's Coming is found in both biblical books and in writings outside of the Bible. So while this imagery maybe foreign to us, it was well understood at the time of Jesus and His disciples. We will see how these birth pains began at Jesus' First Coming as Messiah, when He inaugurated His Kingdom of Heaven on earth through His Death and Resurrection, and we will see how these same birth pains continue, and will likely intensify to varying degrees, throughout these Last Days, during the Church, until Jesus Comes Again.

Structure of Matthew 24 is central to how we understand these End-Times (D.A. Carson). Our structure must account for:

- 1). The plain meaning for the 1st century listeners and readers, and
- 2). The parallel accounts in the other Gospels to ensure there is no contradiction in our interpretation.

Matthew 24:1-28 – "**Messianic Birth Pains**" (Tribulation: The 'Signs' of Christ's Coming)"

*Verse 3 – The disciples express their misunderstanding that the destruction of the temple, the end of age, and the coming of the Messiah will all be connected in one event.

*Verses 4-28 – give us a description of "The Birth Pains of the Messiah" which are paralleled in extra-biblical literature.

Verse 8 – states these are the beginning of birth pains. These events in verses 4-28 were happening at that time of Christ's First Coming. These signs were like Braxton Hicks Contractions, practice contractions, in the 1st century AD. Rather, than discontinue, however, these Braxton Hicks contractions transition into the full-blown real labor pains for the Final Delivery of the End, and these labor pains are continuing until Jesus Returns. That they mark the "beginning" of the Messianic

birth pains illustrates a delay between the First and Second Comings of Christ. There was an intensification of these “beginning birth pains”, of these Braxton Hicks contractions, with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD that is described in verses 15-21.

Verses 9-10 (READ) – Persecution and apostasy characterize the time between the First and Second Comings of Christ. Those who are merely professing Christians in the visible Church that “fall away”, apostatize, were discussed last time in 2 Thessalonians 2.

Verses 15-21 (READ) – These verses are historically specific passages about 1st century Jerusalem. Here are very intense Braxton Hicks contractions that may point to an intensification of the real worldwide labor pains preceding Christ’s Second Coming. The “abomination that causes desolation”, when compared to other Gospel accounts, is combined with the armies approaching the City (Luke 21:20). When seeing this, Christians fled to the wilderness. “Let the reader understand” refers to the reader of the Book of Daniel; not to Matthew’s Gospel. Daniel foresaw a time when a pagan Syrian ruler, Antiochus IV, would desecrate God’s temple. This occurred in 168 BC, and that past event, for Jesus and His hearers, served as a type, or foreshadow, of the future destruction of the temple in 70 AD. In turn, we will see Jesus using prophetic foreshortening by applying what would happen to Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD to the Future End of Time prior to His Return. ~~Likely, this is the thought behind the works of Paul’s “man of lawlessness” (1 Thessalonians 2:3-4).~~ This appears to be what we have next in....

Verse 21 – When Romans closed in on Jerusalem, no one escaped alive. All Jews were either killed or enslaved. Again, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple appears to function as a type, or foreshadow, of an intensification of tribulation “labor pains” during this Church Age prior to Christ’s Return. The Braxton Hicks contractions of these events in 70 AD were so intense and painful, they could be mistaken for the real labor pains of Christ’s Second Coming, but they were not. Instead, these Braxton Hicks contractions persist and transition into the real full-blown and drawn-out “Messianic Birth Pains” of the world.

Verses 22-28 (Verses 4-5, 11) – **Verse 22 (READ)** shifts our focus from the temple and Jerusalem to worldwide humanity. “No one” (no ‘flesh’) is general (not specific to Jews) and communicates that ‘nobody’ would survive apart from God’s intervention. These verses refer to the entire Church Age between Christ’s First and Second Comings. **Verse 11 (READ)** “Many people will listen to many prophets. The warning here is NOT against skepticism but against [a tendency to be too ready to believe that something is real or true]” (Carson). In *verse 28*, Jesus’

Return will be as visible as lighting in the sky and vultures circling around the rotting flesh of dead animals. We will not miss it, so we are not to go after "falsely" / "self" 'anointed' teachers / prophets who profess they have it figured out!

Summary of the Characteristics of Persisting “Messianic Birth Pains” Between Jesus’ First and Second Comings: *The Present Church Age (These Last Days)*

1. International Conflicts (*Verses 6-7a*)
2. Natural Disasters (*Verse 7b*)
3. Persecuting Opposition (*Verse 9*)
4. Apostasy and Spiritual Conflicts (*Verse 10*)
5. Worldwide Gospel Proclamation until the End (*Verse 14*).
6. Deceptive claims of “False Christs” and False Prophets who propagate false teaching (*Verses 4-5, 11, 23-26*). This Includes "self-anointed" prophets and teachers who claim they are specially anointed by God to speak for Him something in addition , or contrary to, His Word.

**Verses 32-35* – look back to the significance of the signs in *verses 4-28*. While the ‘fig tree’ typically refers to Israel, that connection is not intended here. "All these things" in *verse 33* refers to the tribulation prior to Christ’s Return. These are the signs that characterize the time between His two Comings and that precede His imminent/looming Return. While there is a delay, He can ‘Come Again’ at any time. "Generation" of *verse 34*, in this context, refers to those alive at that time; those whom Jesus is addressing. All these things took place within that generation of hearers, but it was not said they would all end in that generation with Jesus Return! Those hearing Jesus would already experience the tribulation/ “distress” described (the same tribulations we should expect to experience in our day, as well, between the two Comings of Christ). These things will continue until Christ’s Return after a time of significant delay as expressed in the subsequent parables.

Matthew 24:45-25:46 – “Parables Articulating How We Are to Wait for Christ’s Return in the Midst of Delay” The parables stress a delay with a call to remain alert and ready. This is a great and merciful delay for the world.

Characteristics of Our Waiting (helpful insights via D.A. Carson lecture)

1. The Wicked Servant (24:45-51) – Wait for the Lord as productive stewards. We will have to give an account for our service; faithful or otherwise. Notice that there is never much compassion for hypocrites! Suffering (weeping) and Despair (gnashing of teeth).
2. The Ten Virgins (25:1-13) - Wait for the Lord as celebrants carefully preparing incase the Bridegroom is delayed. There is no problem with sleeping,

and there is no significant meaning behind the oil. The “Bride” is not mentioned; because, the focus is on the Return of the Bridegroom at any moment.

3. The Talents (25:14-30) - Wait as servants called to improve our Master's assets. The wicked servant unjustly characterizes his Master and skirts his responsibility. Where the virgins thought it was too easy and were unprepared, the wicked servant thought it was too difficult and failed to put forth any effort. What have we done with all the assets (money, time, gifts, and abilities) that God has given us; especially if they are things that would be helpful for our brothers and sisters in Jesus? This is key in the following parable. Servants are rewarded with both blessedness and increased responsibility in the King’s Kingdom.

4. The Sheep and the Goats – Wait for the Lord as people who are unaware of ourselves because we are genuinely serving our fellow Christians. **READ Verses 37-40.** Our lives as Christians are to be so unselfconsciously transformed by the gospel that we are characterized by self-sacrificial service toward our Brethren in Christ. Both groups are surprised about the REASON for their status before God. The surprise of the righteous demonstrates that they did NOT see their works as an attempt to gain merit or favor before Christ the King. Therefore, this passage eliminates the possibility of hypocrisy. The righteous live as who they are “in Christ” which is demonstrated in what they do. Sins of omission are the key here. Not serving fellow Christians when there’s a need, especially if we have the resources, is equivalent to not serving Jesus as He commands.

How are you waiting for our Lord’s Return? Are you ready for His arrival? What will Jesus find you doing or thinking when He suddenly appears in glory? Tribulation, rumors of wars, wars, false messiah’s, false teachers pointing to false messiahs, these are all indicators of the Last Days we are in preceding Jesus’ Return. Rather than lose hope, we must realize that such signs are indicative that we are on track to the future of Jesus’ Return. Our duty, however, is to be ready for that arrival which could be at any time. We are to be prepared for the Return of our Bridegroom; for the End of our journey and arrival into eternity. We want to be dressed in Jesus’ righteousness and filled with His Spirit; not naked, unprepared and hiding from Him in shame and disgrace. However, being prepared does not mean we are to be calculating dates to determine when He will Return. That is not for us to know, and it is a godless and dishonorable waste of time. That is a distraction. Instead, we should be devoting our time to heralding the Good News of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection to a fallen world while loving one another as Jesus loved us. AMEN.