

## **“The Beginning of Birth Pains” (part 2)**

Mark 13:5-8

Over the last two or three decades or so, there has been an increase in Hollywood disaster films. In fact, there have been so many disaster movies made that it now has its own film genre. These films often feature large casts of actors and multiple plot lines that focus on the characters' attempts to avert, escape, or cope with the disaster and its aftermath. Though the plot lines and characters vary, the disaster movie is always predictable—man is enjoying life, man experiences disaster, disaster ruins man's life, man rebuilds—the end. That's pretty much how these movies go.

Disaster films are usually blockbusters that open to packed theaters. One wonders why there is so much interest in mayhem and carnage on the big screen. Perhaps its because, though he may not admit it, mankind knows that he is ultimately powerless and that disaster is somehow always inevitable in our world.

In many ways, the plot line of the Bible is one of disaster and recovery. In the beginning, God created a perfect world and a perfect environment for man. Then a major disaster happens as those made in God's image rebel against Him and thereby plunge the world into sin and death. The whole of Scripture is the story of God's recovery of that which was lost, ruined and spoiled by man's sin. Jesus Christ is the main character, the Hero from heaven who saves the day. In this passage of Scripture known as the Olivet Discourse, Jesus explains for His disciples just how disastrous sin has been and how it will get even worse before it gets better at His second coming.

Jesus begins His discourse on the Mount of Olives by telling His disciples about the beginning of birth pains, the things that they can anticipate in a fallen world that is under the tyranny of sin and Satan and one that groans for the perfect rule of Christ.

The first birth pain that He mentions involves deception. He begins the Olivet Discourse by saying in verse 5, “See that no one leads you astray.” Jesus essentially tells His disciples, “Don't be DECEIVED by counterfeit saviors.” He says that in the days preceding His return, many will claim to speak for Christ, some even claiming to be Christ. These false saviors will promise hope and salvation for those who follow them, but will lead many to their doom.

What do we need to know about deception? Three things:

- the one behind deception is Satan himself
- the way deception works is revealed in the Bible
- Jesus Christ is our victory over deception

The key to avoiding deception is to saturate your mind and heart with the truth. When we fill our minds with the truth and live in the truth, God's Spirit gives us discernment and the ability to distinguish truth from error. There is a second birth pain that Jesus mentions:

## **2. Don't be DISTRESSED over global conflicts**

*“And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.”*

The second labor pain that Jesus mentions in the text has to do global conflict—wars and rumors of wars. In the days preceding His return, the world will become a more volatile place.

Jesus says that the age will be marked by a continual turmoil among the nations, conflicts that produce a torrent of fear, horror, misery, and death. It will be a violent age of increasing terrorism and threats of violence among various groups of people.

**“Alarming Increase in War” (History Today, July 2011)** - *“New research by Professors Mark Harrison from the University of Warwick and Nikolaus Wolf from Humboldt University has revealed that between 1870 and 2001, the frequency of wars between states increased steadily by 2% a year on average. Between 1870 and 1913, the frequency of ‘pairwise’ conflicts (the numbers of pairs of countries involved in conflicts) increased on average by 6% per year. The frequency of wars increased by 17% per year in the period of the First and Second World Wars, and by 31% per year during the Cold War. In the 1990s, the frequency of wars between states rose by 36% per year.”*

This is even more striking when you consider the increasing death toll from war conflicts over the centuries. In fact, more people died in war during the 20th century than all the previous centuries of recorded human history combined. More than 100 million people died in global conflicts from 1900 to 1999. Consider:

- There are four major wars that are ongoing right now that have claimed the lives of 10,000 or more people in the last year.

- There are ten wars that are ongoing right now that have claimed the lives of 1,000 to 10,000 people in the last year.
- There are 38 conflicts that ongoing right now that have claimed the lives of 100 to 1,000 people in the last year.

**“War”** - word is ‘*polemos*’ and is the word from where we get our word ‘*polemic*’ which describes a verbal/written attack on someone

Included in this is the idea of attacks and rumors of attacks.

The nations of the world are like a churning sea that knows no calm, rife with war, genocide, and death. Threat of attack is very real. Threats of terrorism from Islamic extremists who want to see the collapse of the west, these are every day occurrences from some part of the world, whether it be a car bomb exploding in Turkey, a gunman in France or San Bernadino, or 767 jets being flown into high rise buildings.

You perhaps have heard the name Georges Sada, a man who was an air force general under Saddam Hussein. Though ethnically he was an Iraqi, religiously he was not Muslim but was an Assyrian Christian. He once opposed an order from Saddam to execute POW’s during the invasion of Kuwait, citing his Christian convictions. He also had refused to join Saddam’s Baathist Party which blocked his ascent into the ranks of power. But he was a military hero, Iraq’s top air force pilot, and Saddam often relied on him about military matters.

Georges Sada wrote a book that was released a few years ago, and it was entitled “Saddam’s Secrets: How an Iraqi General Defied and Survived Saddam Hussein.” Listen to what this man had to say about the nature of Islamic terrorism:

**Georges Sada** - *“I’m often asked about militant Islam and the threat of global terrorism. More than once I’ve been asked about the meaning of the Arabic words ‘Fatah’ and ‘Jihad.’ What I normally tell them is that to followers of the militant brand of Islam, these doctrines express the belief that Allah has commanded them to conquer the nations of the world both by cultural invasion and by the sword. In some cases this means moving thousands of Muslim families into a foreign land—by building mosques and changing the culture from the inside out, and by refusing to assimilate or adopt the beliefs or values of that nation—to conquer the land for Islam.”*

In the book, Georges Sada goes on to warn those of us in the West that this type of Islamic extremism is not simply a Middle Eastern problem or a European problem. The ultimate goal of these militants is the conquest and collapse of America.

**Georges Sada** - *"They won't be stopped by appeasement. They are not interested in political solutions. They don't want welfare—their animosity is not caused by hunger or poverty or anything of the sort. They understand only one thing: total and complete conquest of the West and of anyone who does not bow to them and their dangerous ideology."*

These terrorists use war and threats of war, fear and intimidation tactics to strike terror in the hearts of their enemies and so advance their demonic agenda.

The Bible says in the last days that perilous times, chaotic times will come, and couldn't it be said that we live in such times?

In a recent book that he wrote, Erwin Lutzer claims that the rise of Islam is a cultural issue that we must be prepared to address as the church. He points out how for years, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has tried its set to get the United Nations to approve an amendment regarding the defamation of religion, nothing more than a universal blasphemy law. If it were approved by the UN, it would mean the criminalization of all criticism of Islam.

**Erwin Lutzer** - *"Americans make a mistake when they judge Islam by its more tolerant American version. If we want to see what Islam is like as a religion, we must judge it by countries where it is in control: Saudi Arabia and Iran."*

In those countries, if a person converts from Islam to Christianity, that person is violently executed in a public fashion. The point I want to make is that at the heart of the greatest conflicts that are ongoing right now in the world is an Islamic ideology.

Islamic extremism is one conflict that we are facing, but perhaps the greatest threat to us is our own immorality as a nation. Consider how violent and lawless we have become as a society here in the US. According to statistics put out by the FBI, in our own nation last year:

- There were an estimated 1,165,383 violent crimes reported by law enforcement.
- Aggravated assaults accounted for 63.6 percent of the violent crimes reported, while robberies accounted for 28.0 percent, rape 7.2 percent, and murders 1.2 percent.

- There were an estimated 8,277,829 property crimes (burglaries, larceny-thefts, and motor vehicle thefts) reported by law enforcement. Financial losses suffered by victims of these crimes were calculated at approximately \$14.3 billion.
- Police made an estimated 11,205,833 arrests during 2014—498,666 for violent crimes, and 1,553,980 for property crimes. More than 73 percent of those arrested during 2014 were male.
- The highest number of arrests was for drug abuse violations (1,561,231), followed by larceny-theft (1,238,190) and driving under the influence (1,117,852).

**2 Timothy 3:1-5 - “But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.”**

Today is Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, and we stop to remember the war that has been launched on human life inside the womb. Since the Roe Vs. Wade decision that was handed down in 1973, there have been nearly 60 million babies aborted, which is a scourge and stain on our society in America. If human life is not safe and sacred within its mother’s womb, than where else can it be safe and sacred? Who would have ever thought that the womb would be a dangerous place to live!

Redemption and forgiveness can be found in Jesus Christ for those who have had an abortion, and for those who are contemplating an abortion, help and counseling can be found. Thank God for the ministry of our Pregnancy Care Center here in High Point! They’ve just changed their name to New Life Family Outreach.

America is being deceptively rocked to sleep in the arms of Satan through philosophies that scream save the trees and kill the children. Human life is sacred and precious, but never has it been more devalued in the west than it is has been in our generation.

War and conflict, terrorism and violence—this is the world we live in here in the 21st century. Yet Jesus says that all of this is no reason for His disciples to panic.

Look at what He says in verse 7:

**Mark 13:7 - “And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet.”**

**“Alarmed”** - *to be troubled in mind; to be disturbed*

**2 Thessalonians 2:2 - “Do not be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.”**

Instead of being deceived, Christ’s followers are to be discerning. And rather than being disturbed, Christ’s followers are to be confident. Jesus has told that all these things must take place, but the end is not yet.

### **3. Don’t be DISMAYED at natural disasters**

*“There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.”*

Natural disasters have happened for as long as recorded history has been recorded.

Regardless of what you may have been led to believe, these are nothing new. We read about severe famines in Genesis, Ruth, and in other places in the Old Testament.

Earthquakes are referenced in 1 Kings, Amos, and other books of the Bible. These are not the “signs of the times.” These are merely the beginning of birth pains.

According to an article last year by Becky Oskin, senior writer with LiveScience, a study was released that found there were more than twice as many big earthquakes in the first quarter of 2014 as compared with the average since 1979.

"We have recently experienced a period that has had one of the highest rates of great earthquakes ever recorded," said lead study author Tom Parsons, a research geophysicist with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in Menlo Park, California. The average rate of big earthquakes—those larger than magnitude 7—has been 10 per year since 1979, the study reports. That rate rose to 12.5 per year starting in 1992, and then jumped to 16.7 per year starting in 2010—a 65 percent increase compared to the rate since 1979. This increase

accelerated in the first three months of 2014 to more than double the average since 1979, according to the research report.

There have been some major earthquakes in the first fifteen years of the 21st century.

NASA scientists using data from the Indonesian earthquake back in 2004 calculated it affected Earth's rotation, decreased the length of day, slightly changed the planet's shape, and shifted the North Pole by centimeters. The earthquake that created the huge tsunami also changed the Earth's rotation.

The Chilean earthquake of 2008 did the same thing, though not quite as much.

The major earthquake that struck Nepal last year caused more than 8,500 deaths, and Time magazine reported it was so powerful that it shifted Mount Everest three centimeters to the southwest.

Coincidence, or the beginning of birth pains?

At the very least, it is enough to cause us to be discerning and diligent as the followers of Jesus Christ. Whenever a natural disaster occurs, it is always reminder that we live in a world that is quickly passing away. Creation is in upheaval and will not rest until her King is ruling and reigning from His rightful throne.

Remember that the disciples had immediate Messianic hopes. They couldn't foresee the age of grace in which you and I now live. They were anticipating Jesus ushering in His perfect kingdom with one wide sweeping move. The fact that there would be a large passing of time in between His two advents was something they couldn't grasp.

Jesus says that there will be a period of time in between His first and second coming, an age that will be characterized by conflict and catastrophe—one right after the other—and like birth pains, these will only increase in frequency and severity until the time when He comes again to make everything new.

We build our houses on ground that moves, in the paths of storms and high winds, and on fault lines that shake. We live in a nation that is the greatest on earth, but like the way of even the best of man's kingdoms, our nation will decline and one day cease to be. Again, it is a reminder that here we have no continuing city.

**Hebrews 13:14 - “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.**

Man builds state of the art buildings and fortified cities, but he can't keep the ground beneath him from shaking.

**Hebrews 12:25-29 - “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. And 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. 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, for our God is a consuming fire.”**

All of creation is groaning for the revealing of the sons of God, which will take place when Christ comes again. And make no mistake about, He is coming again. Could be today, could be tomorrow, but Jesus is coming again for His church. Nothing can prevent it from happening. Until that day comes, false saviors, global conflicts, natural disasters—these are merely the beginning of birth pains that characterize the age preceding Christ's return. How does Jesus tell us to live in light of the fact? He says:

- Don't be deceived by false saviors—Be DISCERNING
- Don't be disturbed by global conflicts—Be CONFIDENT
- Don't be dismayed at natural disasters—Be PATIENT

He is our hope and salvation, and those who trust in Him have no need to fear!