

Birth Pains

by Lynn Andrew

Isaiah was the first to use the birth-pain metaphor when referring to the rebirth of Israel, that future time when the Kingdom of God will suddenly be established on earth, when world government is borne on the shoulders of Messiah commencing at his second coming:

Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children. (Is 66:8)

Jesus himself is the next one in the biblical record to use the birth-pain metaphor in this context. In the course of answering his disciples' question about the timing of the advent of the Kingdom, he says,

All these are the beginning of the birth pains. (Matt. 24:8, Mark 13:8)

The third appearance of the metaphor is in the apostle John's Revelation of Jesus Christ:

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. And she being with child cried, travailing in birth pains to be delivered. (Rev. 12:1-2)

When the disciples inquired about the timing of his coming to rule on earth, they were asking Jesus for clarification of a prophecy with which they were familiar. Every Jew was acquainted with the Prophets and took them as foundational scripture. So Jesus' use of the same metaphor was natural: he was not pointing them to Isaiah; they were asking him about Isaiah's exact meaning. We can assume¹ that

¹ Matt. 5:17 "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets ... until heaven and earth pass away, neither jot nor tittle will pass from the Law till all be fulfilled."

he was supplying the details they asked for, not refuting or revising or reinterpreting what Isaiah had said. Similarly in John's vision, additional information about the same issue is revealed.

Isaiah was concerned with the pagan religious practices that were fashionable in his day, such syncretism making hypocrites of many who would on that account be excluded from the Kingdom. Jesus warned his followers about the potential for being deceived as they looked forward to his return. John's vision widens the scope further, revealing Satan's purpose in defeating God's plan for Israel and her King. Though the scope progressively widens, all three are about Israel birthing the Messiah and his Kingdom in spite of the deceiver.

If we wish to understand Jesus' discourse in Matthew 24 in the same way that his disciples understood it and as he meant it, we must first study Isaiah. Likewise, both Isaiah and Matthew are prerequisites for understanding Revelation.

The next section in this essay presents Isaiah 66, Matthew 24, and Revelation 12 in their entirety. (The translation is basically the KJV lightly paraphrased for easier reading.) An attempt has been made to trace by means of color coding the common elements that occur in two or more of the three chapters.

We need not demand that common elements be repeated identically, and indeed they are not. When we view them as being complimentary, not separate and not contradictory, a larger view emerges. Still it is only a bare outline, scarcely a sketch of the future. We get a sense of how limited our knowledge is.

The color coding identifies these elements:

Yellow highlight – the birth-pain metaphor;

Bordeaux – deceiver(s), false prophets;

Pink – syncretism (adopting foreign practices), insincerity;

Cyan – persecution by progressive or apostate brethren;

Blue – Rapture watch;

Sky Blue – supernatural escape (Rapture);

Red – fire and sword of the Lord, retribution;

Orange – destruction of the temple;

Green – Jews fleeing to safety by natural means;

Purple – Christ's sudden return;

Magenta – regathering of Israel's remnant;

Yellow-green – the slain and lost;

Yellow – preaching good news (of the Kingdom's coming);

Turquoise – concerning the Kingdom government.

Isaiah 66:

Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool. Where could you build a house for me, or where is a place you could make for me to rest? Heaven and earth I have made, and my throne and footstool have always been," says the LORD.

The fallacy of man-made religion being blended with God-given religion.

"This one I will bless: he who is of a poor and contrite spirit and trembles at my word.

Jesus specified the blessing: The meek and poor in spirit inherit the earth and are entitled to participate in heaven's rule over it. (Matt. 5:3,5)

[As for the others (hypocrites):]

"He who kills an ox is as if he slew a man; he who sacrifices a lamb as if he broke a dog's neck; he who offers an oblation as if he offered swine's blood; he who burns incense as if he blessed an idol. Yes, they have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in their abominations.

This is what the Lord thinks of insincere worship or hypocrisy.

"I also will choose their delusions and will bring their fears upon them because when I called none answered and when I spoke they did not hear; but they did evil before my eyes and chose that in which I delighted not."

Self-reliant apostates.

Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: "Your brethren who hated you and cast you out for my name's sake, saying, 'Let the LORD be glorified,' shall be ashamed when he appears to your joy."

Persecution by unfaithful brethren

Applicable to the Rapture.

[In that day there will be] a voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple: the voice of the LORD rendering recompense to his enemies [the unfaithful/hypocritical Israelites].

Suggests destruction of the temple.

Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.

Both the Messiah's birth and his future administration based in Jerusalem are in view.

"Shall I bring to the birth and not cause to bring forth?" says the LORD. "Shall I cause to bring forth then shut the womb?" says your God.

Fleeing to safety.

Israelites who escape the Tribulation come back immediately from their hiding place (the womb).

He guarantees they will come back born again.

Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad with her, all you who love her; rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her. That you may drink and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that you may "milk out" and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. For thus says the LORD, "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream; then shall you suck; you shall be borne upon her hips and be dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you, and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. And when you see this, your heart will rejoice and your bones will flourish like an herb; and the hand of the LORD will be seen blessing his servants—and his indignation toward his enemies."

The joy of regathered Israel in their reborn city.

Messianic rule.

For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh, and the slain of the LORD will be many.

The Great Tribulation.

"They who sanctify themselves and purify themselves in the gardens behind the sacred tree, eating swine's flesh and abominable things such as mice, shall be consumed together," says the LORD. "For I know their works and their thoughts.

Deceivers, idolators, false prophets, apostates.

"It shall come about, that I will gather all nations and tongues, and they shall come and see my glory. I will set a sign among them: I will send those that escape from them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud (that draw the bow); to Tubal, and Javan; to the isles far off that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. And

Theocratic government.

These are Israelites who had found refuge in unbelieving nations going back to evangelize.

they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the LORD out of all nations upon horses, in chariots, in litters, upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem," saith the LORD, "as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD.

Reborn Israelites returning by natural means.

"And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites," saith the LORD. "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me," saith the LORD, "so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass that from one new moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before me," says the LORD. "And they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they will be an abhorrent to everyone.

Permanent government of the Messiah.

Pilgrims to Jerusalem will be horrified by this exhibit, and thereby kept from disobedience.

Matthew 24:

As Jesus went out and departed from the temple, his disciples came to him to point out the buildings of the temple.

They pointed out the apparent permanence of the temple, wondering because Isaiah seemed to predict it would be destroyed once again.

And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all that goes on here? Truly I

"You see all these" is taken to mean not just the physical temple, but more significantly the hypocrisy involved.

Applies to 70 AD as well as end times.

say to you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down."

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came to him pri-

vately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the world?"

Jesus answered and said to them, "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am Christ,' and will deceive many.

Deception warning for unspecified length of time.

"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes, in various places.

"All these are the beginning of sorrows [Strong's definition: a pang or throe, especially of childbirth—pain, sorrow, travail).

Then they will deliver you up to be afflicted and will kill you, and you will be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended and shall betray one another and shall hate one another.

Applies to church age as well as end time.

And many false prophets will arise, and will deceive many.

And because iniquity will abound, the love of many will wax cold. But he that endures unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Or those living at the end will escape by one means or another.

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; and then shall the end come.

This references Isaiah's prophecies of the post-tribulation witnesses to the nations.

Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand) then let them in Judea flee into the mountains: let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house, neither let him who is in the field return

A clear sign: warning sufficient to allow time to escape (barely). Did not apply as things turned out in 70 AD. Must be to Jews at mid Tribulation.

back to take his clothes. And woe to them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! But pray that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day. For then shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

For the sake of those Jews chosen to be protected during the Tribulation.

Then if any man shall say to you, "Lo, here is Christ" or there, believe it not. For there will arise false Christs and false prophets who will show great signs and wonders such that, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect.

Such deception would naturally follow the Rapture since Christ's return is next. The elect are the same ones mentioned above.

Behold, I have told you beforehand.

Wherefore if they say to you, "Behold, he is in the desert," go not forth. Or, "behold, he is in the secret chambers," believe it not. For as the lightning comes out of the east and shines even to the west, so also the coming of the Son of man will be. For wherever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

His coming will be sudden and unmistakable ...

... at a time when Israel is fallen low. (borrowing metaphor from. Ez 17)

[Again in different words:]

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give her light, the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn; and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

[This too will take place (not in sequence):]

And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of

Supernatural gathering. Fits only the Rapture.

heaven to the other. Now learn a parable of the fig tree: When its branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So likewise when you see all these things you will know that it is near, even at the doors. Truly I say to you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour no man knows, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

The fig tree symbolizes Israel. Some in the generation that sees new (spiritual) life in Israel will live to see the Rapture.

Not saying that heaven and earth will pass away, but that this promise of the Rapture will surely be fulfilled.

The season but not the exact day is knowable.

[Now back to the Second Coming:]

But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

The faithful remnant of Israel will escape the deluge of wrath by physical means.

Then shall two be in the field: one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill: one shall be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you know not what hour your Lord will come. But know this: that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be also ready, for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man comes.

The faithful remnant in the church will escape (Raptured) supernaturally.

The Rapture breaks up the church because not all are wanting to participate.

Who is a faithful and wise servant whom his lord has made ruler over his

household, to give them meat in due season?

Blessed is that servant whom his lord when he comes shall find so doing. Verily I say to you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant shall say in his heart, "My lord delays his coming," and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken, the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looks not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Raptured saints take part in Kingdom government.

Revelation 12:

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and upon her head a crown of twelve stars, and being with child she cried, **travailing in birth, in pain** to be delivered.

Israel in the light of her God, the pagan deities under her feet, about to give birth to the Messiah.

And there appeared another wonder in heaven: behold a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns upon his heads. His tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth, and the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to be delivered in order to devour her child as soon as he was born.

Satan, knowing the prophecies, made every preparation to thwart the Messianic Kingdom, trying at this point to prevent Jesus from reaching maturity.

And she brought forth a man child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up unto God, to his throne.

[Fast forward two thousand years:]

The woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, where they

The remnant of Israel flees to her safe place during the second half of the Tribulation.

would feed her a thousand, two hundred, and threescore days.

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought and prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent called the Devil and Satan, which deceives the whole world. He was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

No longer able to persecute Israel, Satan battles to resume his office in heaven but finds he no longer has any place there.

And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now is come salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ. For the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. And they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens, and you that dwell in them."

Satan no longer has anything to bring against the brethren of Christ.

Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath because he knows that he has but a short time.

[Repeating with more detail:]

And when the dragon saw that he was cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who brought forth the man child.

Satan can read prophecy as well as anyone. He knew he would be cast out of heaven and would someday be prevented from persecuting Israel.

And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

She will be airlifted to a place of safety, to stay there 3 ½ years.

And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman,

that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood.

Satan's version of the deluge does not sink her "ark," the planned airlift. The water may be words: satanic misinformation or perhaps a cyber attack.

And the earth helped the woman; the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

The devil's campaign gets nowhere, perhaps due to an earthquake destroying critical communication infrastructure or satellites crashing into the earth's atmosphere.

And the dragon was wroth with the woman and went to make war with the remnant of her seed which keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

So Satan concentrates on Gentile Christians grafted into Israel since the Rapture.

Time Line:

700 BC

Warnings against religious apostasy, adopting pagan religion, syncretism. (66:1-4)

4 BC

Jesus virgin-born in the line of kings. (66:7,9, 12:5)
Herod fails in an attempt kill him. (66:9, 12:4)

33 AD

Warnings against deceptive signs and false prophets. (66:17, 24:11, 24:24)

Jesus ascends to the throne of God in heaven. (12:5)

70 AD

Temple destroyed (66:6, 24:2)

70 AD ... ?

Wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, false Messiahs, persecutions (66:5, 24:4-12, 12:11)

2060? AD (to pick a number – no good reason for 60)

Fig tree gets new leaves (eg. Israel stops opposing Christian missions) (24:32)

2063? AD (not necessarily this soon – could be still a generation away)

Rapture (66:5b?, 24:30-36, 24:40-50)

False Messiahs (66:17, 24:24-26)

Temple rebuilt

2066? AD (not necessarily this soon after Rapture)

Jewish remnant flees (66:19, 24:15-20, 24:37-39, 12:6, 12:14-16)

Great Tribulation (66:15, 24:21-22, 12:17)

Temple desecrated (66:6, 24:15) (one of several chapter/verse-number curiosities in Isaiah)

Jesus Christ returns (66:15-16, 24:27, 24:29-30)

Enemies of Israel destroyed (66:14-18, 24:28-30, 24:51)

2070? AD (2000 years after Jerusalem destroyed by Romans)

Jewish remnant returns to build Millennium temple and be nucleus of government in Jerusalem (66:8, 66:9, 66:21-22)

Jewish missionaries go out to the nations. (66:19-20, 66:24:4)

Peace and pilgrimages to Zion from all nations (66:10-14, 66:18, 66:23)

Dead on display (66:24)

Note how foundational Isaiah is and that he goes further into the future on these points than do the other two selections.

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