

Sermon Title: The Beginning of Birth Pangs  
Scripture Text: Mark 13:5-13

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 10-6-19

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Join me, please, at Mark Chapter 13, where last Lord's Day, we arrived at the beginning of the famous Olivet Discourse...cleverly titled because, well, it's a "discourse"—it's Jesus's longest recorded answer to any question that He was ever asked during His ministry; and it's called "Olivet" because He spoke it on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the temple and the city of Jerusalem. It took place on the evening of His final day of public ministry; He had been in the temple all day, and we've been studying that for some time now. It is the time when Jesus had just predicted the total destruction of the temple; we saw that in the first four verses.

Then came the key question from the disciples. He had been talking about judgment, He had cleared the temple, He had used the fig tree that He'd cursed as a picture of judgment coming on Israel. Mark records the question; Matthew records it in its fullest version. Here's the question that Jesus is answering in the Olivet Discourse: "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3; NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

"These things" refers to what Jesus just said about the destruction of the temple: "Not one stone here will be left upon another" (vs. 2). "Your coming" refers to the time when He would set up the kingdom of God on Earth (see Matt. 25:31-34). And remember: they were *just ready* for this! "They supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately" (Lk. 19:11), as they made their way up to Jerusalem; they had already waited *three days*! "So, when are You bringing the kingdom? We know you're the King!" (see Acts 1:6-7). And then, "the end of the age" refers to how everything would need to be wrapped up in the affairs of mankind, in the plan of God, prior to the inauguration of the kingdom.

I just did a quick overview of it at the end of the sermon, but we saw, last time, that "the disciples" there—they were the true believers among Israel at that time—they understood and had a pretty good grasp of the fact that Israel was going to be established in the land promised to Abraham (Gen. 12:7; 15:18; 17:8; Ezek. 47:13-20); that there would be a time when the nations of the world would stream to Israel and to Jerusalem (Zech. 8:20-23; 14:16), because that *would be* the headquarters of the kingdom of God on Earth (Zech. 8:1-8; 14:9-11), headed by "the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15); they understood that there was to be a forerunner of the King, who would announce His coming (Is. 40:3; Mal. 4:5-6)—that's why they had responded so favorably to John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1-3; Lk. 1:17); and they also understood that there would be a time of intense persecution before the King set up the kingdom (Jer. 30:7-10; Zech. 14:2-9), and they thought that was happening to them right then. So it's in Luke 19:11 where we saw that, as they made their way up to Jerusalem before the Triumphal Entry, they who were with Jesus—that would include the disciples—"supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately." They thought, when they hit Jerusalem, it's Coronation Day! The King is here—the kingdom is here.

Now, their expectations were accurate, but they couldn't grasp the *timing* of how those things would turn out, because the idea of there being an interval of time between the King arriving in Jerusalem and the beginning of the kingdom—that wasn't revealed yet; that was not revealed in the Old Testament. The Old Testament does not reveal the period of time in which we live—usually called "The Church Age." It is also called "the times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24).

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This whole era is a mystery in the Bible. Now, that doesn't mean spooky, mysterious, scary *murder* mystery; a "mystery," in Bible terminology, is something not revealed in the Old Testament and made known in the New Testament (Rom. 16:25-26; Col. 1:26). They couldn't have seen this yet, because it had not been fully unveiled yet. It had *started* to be revealed, because Jesus began to reveal this mystery era—all within the sovereignty of God, all within His kingdom plan all along.

But, remember back in His ministry in Galilee, when He was doing all those miracles, and the leaders of the Jews—especially the Pharisees and their scribes—openly, publicly rejected Him; and they said: "Everything He does, He does by the power of Satan!" And immediately, Jesus switched His teaching style in public, and started to teach to the public in parables; and He told several parables about this era that was about to begin, and He explained to the disciples what He was doing when He did that. Matthew 13:11 is the most specific description of it; it says: "Jesus answered them"—that's when they asked Him to interpret the first of the parables—He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them"—that would be the unbelieving ones, the ones that reject it—"it has not been granted."

And then, He began to explain things in terms that *had to baffle* those guys! This whole era is going to be a time of sowing seed, and there will be various responses; sowing seed, and there'll be good seed, and an enemy will sow bad seed; sowing seed, and there's going to be remarkable growth—like from a little tiny mustard seed, this entire plant, big enough for the birds to come and nest in. It's going to be like a time of casting a net, and the gospel is like the net, and you drag the net along, and you get wonderful, yummy, marketable, beautiful fish—and trash-fish and old boots and other stuff; it all has to be sorted out in the end.

But, there is going to be this long time; He had begun to make that known, but *they* did not yet have enough information to have fit all of that together. *We* have that information, because we have the fullness of the revelation of the mystery, and we live in that era. Peter, writing many years later, in First Peter 1, Verses 10 through 12, explains that even the Old Testament prophets themselves couldn't sort out how what God told them fit together. They were told of the Messiah—and, especially, he is referring to Isaiah here; Isaiah was told of a Messiah who would be this "Suffering Servant / Sacrifice / Savior"—*and*, he was told of this Savior who would be this glorious King. How could those fit together? It was because they couldn't see two comings, that they couldn't grasp how that fit together. And if you read what Peter says, it was told to them that they had received this information, but it wasn't for their era. He said: "It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you" (vs. 12). So God has had this plan all along (1 Cor. 2:7), and He's making it known incrementally, if you will.

So in our text, even though they couldn't understand the long time between His death and His glorious kingdom, this discourse is Jesus explaining what the world is going to be like *just before* He returns to bring the kingdom of God to Earth. Now, I'm going to take you through our text for this morning, all the way from Verse 5 through verse 13; I want to whisk you through that in short order, and then I want to back up and help you see it in the context in which it's written, and in the broader context of Scripture.

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Jesus is telling them what to expect. Remember: What were *they* expecting? The kingdom *right now*. Now, here's what Jesus is going to tell them is "the beginning of birth pangs" (Mk. 13:8)—and you'll see that phrase in our text. We can take these verses, and just for sake of an outline, Jesus says: Don't Be Misled, Expect Wars, Expect Devastation, Be On Your Guard, Prepare To Proclaim The Gospel, and Expect To Be Abandoned. So let's dive right in, and then we'll circle back over it again.

Mark 13:5 and 6—"And Jesus began to say to them"—this is the beginning of the answer to the question—"See to it that no one misleads you. Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He!' and will mislead many." Now, we haven't been introduced to the term "birth pang" yet; that'll be here in a couple verses. But the first "birth pang" that signals the very near return of Christ is going to be: widespread deception by more and more false Christs.

Now, there were false Christs before Jesus came—people claiming to be the Savior. There have been many since then. There have been dozens who have claimed to be Christ, or claimed to be some new incarnation of Christ, just in the years that I've walked with the Lord; and I've only been around as a Christian for about a half-century. In the end times, Jesus is saying, that kind of deception will be *vastly* increased.

If you put together all of what the Bible teaches about the future, we know that many in those days are going to believe that the "Antichrist" (1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn. 7), "the man of lawlessness" (2 Thess. 2:3), "the man of sin" (2 Thess. 2:3, KJV), "the prince who is to come" (Dan. 9:26)—some of his Biblical names—they're going to believe that *he* is the true savior (see Jn. 5:43; cf. Rev. 13:8). The deception in that time is going to be *very* powerful. And because deception will be at its apex, Jesus warns: "See to it that no one misleads you."

Now, make no mistake: con men have preyed on the desperate for centuries. There are myriad spiritual con men and deceivers right now. But in those days, it's going to be worse than ever, and they are going to play right into the hands of Satan; many of them are even going to be welcoming the Devil's influence and his power in their lives. And many are going to cling to phony saviors (Prov. 14:12). So He says: "Don't Be Misled."

Pang Number 2—Expect Wars. Mark 13:7—"When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end." I wouldn't blame you if you were saying, "Well, now, wait a minute! There have been con men all along; there have been false teachers all along. I can't tell you how many wars I've heard of, rumors of wars I've heard of. This is talking about *this present age!*"—and a lot of people take this passage this way; and before you leave this morning, I think you'll know why *not to*. It's not saying these things aren't going on now; all of those things *have been* going on, ever since the Tower of Babel—nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom. But it's going to get *incredibly worse*. And notice what Jesus said: As terrible as these things will be, they "must take place"—this is God's plan; this *will* take place (cf. Gen. 15:16). And even then, it is "not yet the end." It is going to get worse.

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Don't Be Misled, Expect Wars, and—Expect Devastation. Verse 8, building on what He said about "wars and rumors of wars": "For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom"—and then, *other kinds* of devastation—"there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs." There is going to be not only unprecedented deception and unprecedented warfare, but unprecedented natural phenomena—supernaturally-effected natural phenomena. In this case, the famines could well be caused by the wars, as well as by the earthquakes. If you read parallel passages in the Book of Revelation, you know there will be *worldwide* earthquakes. I don't know about you—I grew up in earthquake country; there's nothing quite as unnerving as the earth moving; it's a very unsettling thing, and it totally disrupts life for a time, wherever it happens. Imagine *worldwide simultaneous* earthquakes! It's going to get really bad.

But Jesus makes it clear: All these things are "merely the beginning of birth pangs." What an interesting word picture Jesus chose! Remember that in this paragraph, He's talking about—answering specifically—the things that lead right up to His second coming, and the bringing of the kingdom to Earth. And He's talking about it in terms of: like the end of a pregnancy. By this time, the contractions will have begun; and they are going to start hurting quite a bit. I've never been pregnant, but I've heard stories. It gets pretty intense there, right toward the end! But these are going to be way more intense than ever before. They're going to come closer and closer together, before the kingdom of God is delivered to Earth.

Now, along with the physical phenomena and the deception going on, there are also going to be terrible times for those who embrace Christ during those days. Don't Be Misled, Expect Wars, Expect Devastation, and then He says: Be On Your Guard. Look at Verse 9—"But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them." Now, again—a lot of people say, "Well, that refers to *our* age." Well, it *describes* things going on in our age, but it's not *referring* to our age, specifically. Other passages tell us, for example—Second Timothy 3:12—that "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Believers *have* been persecuted ever since the birth of the Church, but it's going to reach *unprecedented levels* in the Tribulation—that 70th Week of Daniel, that seven years leading up to the second coming.

You're going to get in trouble with "the courts"—that's Gentile and secular authorities—and in "the synagogues"—representing the unbelieving Jewish authorities who will continue to think they are doing God a favor by trying to snuff out Christians (Jn. 16:2). To believe in Jesus Christ during the Tribulation time will likely cost you your freedom, will certainly cost you your civil rights, public respect; in many cases, it may cost the life of the one who believes in Christ. Revelation Chapter 6, Verses 9 through 11, describes innumerable martyrs *from that time period* who are in heaven, crying out to God for vengeance for their lives that were taken.

Let's go on—these are "the beginnings of birth pangs": Don't Be Misled, Expect Wars, Expect Devastation, Be On Your Guard, and now—here's the good news in this: Prepare To Proclaim The Gospel. Mark 13:10—"The gospel must first be preached to all the nations." Well, we know the gospel needs to be preached. And according to the instruction of Jesus, where does

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it need to be preached? And according to what He said is going to be the Church, where should we take the gospel? Well, "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Where should we preach the gospel? Well, where are you? *That's* where you're supposed to preach it. Where are you going? *That's* where you're supposed to take it with you (Acts 8:4). Where *hasn't* it gone? *That's* where you should be *trying* to go, to take the gospel.

But notice that word "first"—"The gospel must *first* be preached to all the nations." "First" *what?* Well, before the kingdom comes. Here is a wonderful promise woven right into this tapestry of end times traumas: Before the return of Jesus, the gospel will be proclaimed worldwide, to a degree never before seen. There is going to be widespread deception, lots of false stuff going on, unprecedented warfare and disaster, fierce persecution of believers—but the gospel will continue to be proclaimed.

We even know how it's going to happen! Again, put the Olivet Discourse alongside the Book of Revelation and the Book of Daniel—this is what ties it all together. We know that, in the end times—in that last seven years—there are going to be several sources of this unprecedented preaching. There will be those "two witnesses"—Revelation Chapter 11, describing them: two prophets of God who prophesy in Jerusalem; they're seen all over the world—something that could not have happened before satellite television, not *literally* being seen all over the world, anyway. According to Revelation 7, there is going to be 144,000 believing Jews who are also, apparently, going to be evangelists. And, in addition to them, also in Revelation 7, there will be "a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues" (vs. 9).

Gentiles and Jews and the two witnesses, from all over the world, *and* just for those that they might not get to, personally, God is going to *supernaturally* see that the gospel is proclaimed. Revelation 14:6 and 7—John writes: "And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, 'Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.'" Even in the time of His greatest outpouring of wrath—and make no mistake: the events of that 70th week are the wrath of God poured out on Earth—there is this universal proclamation of the good news that salvation is available through the Savior that the Giver of that wrath has actually provided! As a matter fact, it's called "the wrath of the Lamb" in Revelation 6:16. The Savior is offering salvation and distributing wrath at the same time (see Ps. 2:12; cf. Matt. 7:23; 25:31, 41; 2 Thess. 1:7-8; Rev. 14:10-11; 19:15-16).

The gospel is going to be preached. *That's* a theme-word in Mark. Remember, I pointed out to you, when we started this book: Chapter 1, Verse 1—and I commend to you the second sermon in this series; the first one was on Mark 1, Verse 0, which is what came before Mark. But look at the one on Mark 1:1. Mark puts as a title over his gospel—it's the introduction—he says this is: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." So he's writing to people who he expected to understand what he meant by that word "gospel," and I explained to you the development of the use of that word. The word "gospel" was specifically understood

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in the Roman world as the description of what they were to receive as "good news"—that's what "gospel" means. The Greek word *euangelion*—*eu* is a prefix that means "good"; *angelion* is a message—the "good message" or the "good word" or the "good news." In the Roman world, they called the "gospel" the "good news about a king and the spread of a kingdom"—specifically, they were talking about, "Look how wonderful Caesar is! And you ought to worship him because he is so wonderful!"

There was actually an even *earlier* use of the term "good news," the "gospel"—Isaiah Chapter 52, Verse 7. Remember, Isaiah heard the song that we sing: "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of them that bring good news," and "Our God reigns, Our God reigns, Our God Reigns, Our God reigns" ("Our God Reigns," Lyrics by Leonard E. Smith Jr.; 2000, New Jerusalem Music). Well, what was that? That was good news predicted by God through Isaiah, that Israel was going to be able to come back to the land after the captivity. The "good news" is that God is making a way for you to be saved! God is making a way for you to be blessed!

And so Mark takes his account of the life of Jesus and puts it in terms that would speak to the Roman world: "This is good news, but—oh, it's not about the king *you're* thinking of! It's about 'Jesus Christ, the Son of God.'"—in *direct distinction* from the current view of the arrival of Caesar. So there's a background to that word.

But, Jesus wasn't preaching that, "Jesus died for your sins," and we know *that* to be the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-3)—so how is it developed? Well, it has this in common: the "good news" is *always* the announcement of salvation, it's *always* the announcement of God's provision. So when John the Baptist came along, he called it "the gospel of God"—it's the good news that God is giving you. What was *His* "good news?" Well, you can be forgiven! You confess, you repent, you can be forgiven (Is. 55:7).

During His ministry, Jesus and the disciples preached good news as well; in their case, it's simply called "the gospel"—the "good news"—or, sometimes it's called "the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14) because the hope of the Jews, the understanding of the Jews, the confidence of the Jews, is that God would fulfill His promise for the kingdom of God to come at the hands of the Messiah.

So always in the Bible, the "gospel" is the message of salvation; it is provided and offered by God to every person who will turn to Him, who will put their trust in Him, who will abandon any other alleged source of salvation (Is. 43:11; cf. Ps. 49:7-9). And as the plan of God unfolds, the gospel has been more and more fully revealed; and in *this* era, we now know it is *one* gospel that is the *only* way of salvation for Jew or Gentile—for anyone who will believe (Acts 10:43; 15:11). And now we know the *fullness* of the gospel, if you will, is as it's recorded in First Corinthians Chapter 15—that Jesus came, He died, He rose again, and it is all in fulfillment of the Scriptures. This is "the gospel." What gospel is going to be preached? *That* gospel. And what is it called in Revelation 14? It's called the "eternal gospel" (vs. 6). You see, it's always the offer of salvation based on what God has accomplished through His grace. It's *still* "the gospel of God"; it's *still* "the gospel of the kingdom"; it's *still* the announcement of

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peace and happiness and salvation because our God reigns—because God is in charge of this whole plan; it's *still* the good news of eternal rewards in the presence of God...but now, with the fullness of the message that Christ Has come, He has died, He said—as far as redemption is concerned—"It is finished" (Jn. 19:30), "there is salvation in no one else" except Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12)—only through His death and resurrection. So in the end, you understand: it *is* "the eternal gospel"—it's the *eternal* plan of God (2 Tim. 1:9).

The word "gospel" wasn't used, but the concept of the Savior was introduced all the way back in Genesis Chapter 3, connected with the promised "seed" of the "woman." So, *this gospel* is going to be preached in its fullness to the whole world—all people, all nations, all languages—it's going to come to everyone. Do you see that with the final outpouring of His wrath also comes the final invitation to His grace? Right to the *very end*, God is "not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9; cf. Ezek. 33:11; 1 Tim. 2:4).

It's all building up to the kingdom. "The beginning of birth pangs"—Don't Be Misled, Expect Wars, Expect Devastations, Be On Your Guard, Prepare To Proclaim The Gospel—if we want to be about end times ministries, what ought we to do? Preach the gospel; that's what we ought to be doing. Number 6—Expect To Be Abandoned. Yeah, there was good news: the gospel is going to be preached like never before. But you don't want to be around, you don't want to be alive during this time. Look at the last three verses of our paragraph: Mark 13:11 to 13—"When they arrest you"—"if you're around then, you're going to get arrested, if you follow Me"—"When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved." So, understand: there is going to be a lot of betrayal, a lot of deception, a lot of other bad stuff. But as a consequence of the power of the deceptions going on, many even supposed Christians are going to defect.

Now, after the Rapture the Church, the Church is taken away; many people are apparently going to make what we might refer to as "foxhole decisions" to be believers. But when the full-blown hatred is unleashed upon everyone who names the name of Christ by the Antichrist and his religious sidekick, "the false prophet" (Rev. 16:13), and the persecution comes through their one-world government and their one-world religion, those not truly committed to Christ are going to jump ship (Rev. 13:8; cf. Matt. 13:21; Heb. 3:14). They will receive "the mark of the beast" (Rev. 19:20; cf. 13:16-17), choosing creature comforts over eternal blessing. Some of them will go so far as to *betray* genuine believers. Sin will be too attractive, the lure will be too compelling, the deception will be too strong, the manipulation will be overwhelming; and those who are unwilling to die for their faith in Jesus Christ—even if they profess to love Him—one day, they're going to become the enemies of the ones who *will* truly lay down their lives for the truth (Rev. 12:11). And once they abandon their pretense of faith in Christ, those same betrayers are going to fall for *all the more* of the delusions, and the false prophets will prey on them, and many will be misled (2 Thess. 2:9-12).

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But, do you notice there, in Mark 13:13, how He adds the description of what true faith will look like in those days? "The one who endures to the end, he will be saved." (see Col. 1:22-23; cf. Dan. 3:16-18). In that context, what is "the end"? Well, "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3). It's specifically referring to the second coming of Christ. Now, if it's necessary for faith to endure to the end at *that* time, trust me: it's necessary *now* for you to be faithful. Somebody came up to me after the first service and said, "Well, I've always heard that 'the one who endures to the end, he will be saved'—well, that means 'the one who endures to the end of *his life* will be saved.'" Yeah—and if you happen to live in that time, you've got to endure to "the end."

When I first got to Russia, I heard this verse quoted a lot, because I met, in every single church I was in on my first several visits there, more than one person who knew somebody—often, it was the former pastor of the church, or it was Uncle so-and-so, or my father, or my parents—who were taken away in the middle of the night for the crime of believing in Christ, or teaching the Bible, or proclaiming the gospel. Sometimes, they would be told, in a day or two, where the body might be found; sometimes, never. And they take this *quite literally!* True believers stand for Christ "to the end." But in this context, "the end" is the second coming.

Now that doesn't mean that you are saved by endurance. That's not what we are saying. You are saved by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8-9). It's not the endurance that produces salvation, it's the salvation that produces the endurance. Endurance and faithfulness to the end is the Spirit-empowered product and evidence of a saved soul (see Ps. 37:34; Jer. 32:40; Ezek. 36:27; Phil. 1:6; 2:13; Jude 24; Rev. 17:14). This doctrine is taught in many ways in the New Testament (e.g. Jn. 6:37-39, 44; 10:27-29; Rom. 8:30); I don't have time to develop any of it for you now. Suffice it to say: this is an end-times application and declaration of the concept that's usually referred to as "perseverance of the saints" (Rev. 14:12)—or, from a different viewpoint, "Eternal Security." There is *no such thing* as a "former Christian" (1 Jn. 2:19; cf. Matt. 7:23). There is no such thing as "temporary saving faith" (Jn. 8:31). It is not possible to have "eternal life" *temporarily*; because, you know, you were born in your sins, you were born alienated from God—you can't be born in that situation *and then* be saved, *and then* again become lost, because that would require God to change His mind (Jn. 5:24; Rom. 8:1), or have a power failure (Jn. 10:29)! Faith which saves *is* faith that *endures!* That's what He's saying.

Now, when they asked: "When will these things be?"—remember: what was their expectation? The Kingdom of God is coming immediately. So if they were going to turn their question into a multiple-choice question, the options they would have given to Jesus were: A—Tonight; "I mean, we've already waited three days since You showed up in town!" Or, B—Tomorrow. C—Day after tomorrow. D—After the Passover; "We would kind of understand that." Or, E—"We could wait another *whole week* until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread." He had told them, though, that the temple that they were looking at would be totally destroyed. He didn't say exactly when; we have the privilege to have hindsight—we know that, that took place about 40 years later. That was *not* one of their answers to the multiple-choice question of "When?" "You're not going to make us wait *40 years!?!?*" Read Chapter 1 of Acts; after *40 days after* the Resurrection, they were still saying: "Is it today? Is it today? Is it today?" Is it now?" They still took a long time for this transition of their understanding to take effect.

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They had not caught on that, when Jesus said to the Pharisees and Sadducees and Herodians and scribes, what we saw in Matthew 23:39—"I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' "—Jesus was making the point that the Triumphal Entry was *not* the ultimate entrance of the King, because the Jews were not fully embracing Him. So the "coming" the disciples had in mind was a good thing—the coming of the King, the coming of the kingdom. They were *not* thinking of a "second coming." They saw all of this happening in an unbroken series of events that would occur over a relatively short period of time, and they believed they were smack dab in that time.

Now, the rest of the Olivet Discourse is going to help clarify the reality of the second coming. Stick around—we're going to see the second coming. I hope we see it *literally*—I hope you don't just have to *hear* about it. Wouldn't that be fantastic! Well, there's a lot that has to happen before that, because it starts with the Rapture the Church; but we'll be talking about it as we move along.

Now, I said I was going to whisk you through the text...I did. Now, I'm going to explain to you some things about it. It's very common for people to read verses like we've just read, *not* pay attention to the context, and say: "Yep, that's the world in which we live! 'Wars'—and when we're not blowing each other up, we're talking about it; there's a 'rumor' about it. Natural disasters. Christians are being persecuted, now more ever. So obviously, that's what Jesus was talking about!"—but, that's not how you interpret the Bible. Remember those three principles of interpretation? Context, Context, and Context.

So, I want to show you now, how we know that what we just read—and what we're going to see next time—is *future*. How do we know this *isn't* right now? I just quoted to you Matthew 23:39. Until the leadership of Israel believes in and embraces Jesus as Messiah, this isn't going to happen. That's a condition, if you will.

Number 2: Mark 13:8—these things are called "the beginning of birth pangs." False Christs, international warfare, famines, earthquakes—those are "merely the beginning." Now, He chose that terminology for a reason; Jesus knew what He was saying. These will be "birth pangs," or "labor pains," as we would say it. That's a very strong picture for the intensity and the sequence of these events. Now, as I said—I've never been pregnant; but I've read things, I've seen things, I've talked to people. Labor pains do not occur at conception. There would be a lot fewer babies, if that was the case. And, ladies, if you've been pregnant, I think you'll say "Amen" to this: They don't occur all through the pregnancy. Now, things *happen* through the pregnancy. Things are happening now. The seed is being sown; there are responses—good responses, bad responses, phony responses. There's a lot going on. But the labor pains come *just before birth*. So, to use the figure of speech of "labor pains" to represent the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, or to refer to all the centuries since then, *wouldn't make sense!* When the labor pains start, the arrival of the baby is near; they start *shortly before delivery*, and they occur with increasing frequency and increasing intensity, until the baby is born. In the analogy, "the baby" is: the second coming of Christ; the "labor pains" are: these unprecedented events building up to this *explosion* of catastrophic things—most of which are described in more detail in Revelation 6 through 19.

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Reason Number 3 that we know this is future: Mark 13:13—"The one who endures to the end, he will be saved." In the context, "the end" can only mean what "the end" means in the context! It is the second coming of Christ. So, that's what we're talking about. And if you accept what we teach from the rest of the Scriptures about the timing of the Rapture the Church, you can see: this has to apply to those who are alive during the time of the Tribulation—or, Daniel's 70th week—after the Church has been raptured.

Number 4, how we know this is future: Mark 13:10—The gospel will be preached in the whole world before the end of the age. Now, that *cannot* refer to the Apostolic Age—the Apostles are all dead. Before they died, even the Roman Empire was only *partially* evangelized. And it doesn't apply to modern times. Now, have we spread the gospel a lot further since the first century? Yes. But, despite the broad spread of the gospel, even with modern mass-media, there are still billions who have never heard the gospel; if you doubt that, call up Wycliffe (Bible Translators) and see if they still need any help getting the Word of God and the gospel to unreached people groups.

Number 5: Mark 13:14, which equals Matthew 24:15—Daniel predicted that, just before the Messiah sets up His kingdom and judges the world, that one who we call the "Antichrist" (1 Jn. 2:18)—in Daniel's terminology, he is "the prince who is to come" (Dan. 9:26)—"he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate" (9:27). There's more detail about that in Second Thessalonians Chapter 2. My friends—*that hasn't happened!* That's yet to occur. Oh, and by the way: that requires a temple in Jerusalem. We've been *fresh out* of Jewish temples in Jerusalem since A.D. 70; there has to be a rebuilt temple. That hasn't happened yet, so we know that it's future.

Number 6: Mark 13:19. Now we've gone beyond our text for today; but trust me: it's there. The terrible events that Jesus describe in the Olivet Discourse—corroborated in Revelation 6 through 19—will be *the worst of all human history*, and they will occur at the very end of the present age. So, you might say it this way: If things can ever get any worse, we're not yet in the Tribulation. Are there some bad things going on? Yes. Might you, in some situations, say, "This couldn't be any worse!?" Well, yeah—but you're not omniscient. This is going to be *unprecedented*.

Number 7: Mark 13:24 through 26, equivalent to Matthew 24:29 to 30—that's the supernatural heavenly phenomena associated with the second coming; *and that's never happened!* That's why Postmillennialism is completely untenable; you have to take those things that are *extremely specific* in their description, and say: "Well, we know absolutely for sure that they *don't mean what they say*, and they already happened, and nobody knew what they were!"

Number 8, how we know this is future: Mark 13:28 through 30—Jesus says: when you see the fig tree budding, you know it's summer. He just cursed a fig tree a few days ago; they knew about fig trees. They say, "You can tell it's summer by how the fig tree looks. You can tell how it's the end of spring, how summer has come, just by looking at the trees around *you* today." And so, the events that Jesus is describing here will signal His immediate return; and He says:



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Let's pray:

*Thank You, our Father for Your faithfulness. Thank You for making known to us that which You will do. Now, Father, by Your grace, by the power of Your Spirit, use us to spread the good news: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. May we speak that boldly and in love, every place You take us. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*