BIRTH PANGS:

How can you say goodbye to something that has not happened yet?

By Douglas Berner

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In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus prophesied, “And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet (Mt 24:6). For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places (Mt 24:7). All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Mt 24:8 KJV). Verse eight in the ESV reads, “All these are but the beginning of the birth pangs.”

The phrase “the beginning of sorrows” in the KJV literally means the beginning of the birth pangs of travail. This symbolically points to the concluding time period of a pregnancy which is marked by a series of intense pangs or stabbing pains which persist and increase until the moment of giving birth. In terms of Bible prophecy, the sorrows or birth pangs represent a series of end-time cataclysms or upheavals which impact the entire world in various ways increasing in intensity and severity until a specific climactic event brings relief or resolution – the birth.

This leaves the student of prophecy with the following questions:

* How and when do the Birth Pangs begin?
* How and when do the Birth Pangs end?
* What is birthed by this pregnancy marked by such cataclysmic birth pains in the end?

Over the past few months there have been many proclamations by a number of pastors and prophecy teachers that the world is undergoing the effects of the Bible’s end-time Birth Pangs. It has been declared that the recent outbreak of coronavirus (Covid-19) is the latest Birth Pang. Several prophecy teachers including: Bill Salus, Randy Nettles, Brandon Holthaus, as well as others, have claimed that this is so.

Some of these teachers seem to present war as a birth pang, the increase in earthquakes as a birth pang, the rise of famine as a separate birth pang, and the presence of the coronavirus pestilence as the latest in a string of birth pangs. Is this view accurate? No. None of these independently represent birth pangs. Jesus proclaimed that “all” of these disasters combined (meaning their simultaneously occurrence or convergence on a global scale) constitute the “beginning” of birth pangs – being the singular very first birth pang – the beginning of the end. This colossal convergence of calamities will then be followed by a series of increasing disasters until the very end.

Other prophecy teachers claim that the Birth Pangs really began with World War I (1914-1918) which was accompanied by some earthquakes, outbreaks of famine, and the severe pestilence of the Spanish Flu (1918-1919). Tim LaHaye and Arnold Fruchtenbaum have been proponents of this view along with the current teaching of Bill Salus and Brandon Holthaus, and others. The basis of their perspective is that the specific phrase used by Jesus in Matthew 24:7, “*nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom*” is considered to be a Jewish idiom which indicates a worldwide or global scale war. Since World War I is considered to be the first such worldwide war – by default they believe the Birth Pangs began in 1914. Their observation is heightened by the extremely virulent eruption of the Spanish Flu towards the end of the war.

In his article “Goodbye Birth Pangs – Hello Tribulation” Bill Salus claims, “The ‘End is Not Yet’ period began in 70 A.D. and has seemingly lasted 1844 years until 1914 A.D. when World War I broke out. This is when nation bagan coming against nation, which is part of the next period called, The Beginning of Sorrows, or Birth Pangs.”

In his book*, The Beginning of the End*, published in 1972, Tim LaHaye took a similar position. LaHaye claimed that, “Until history produces a more acceptable fulfillment, it is reasonable to conclude that 1914 ushered in the beginning of the end.” LaHaye further believed that the “Sign of the End of the Age” was World War I.

This claim is also articulated by Arnold Fruchtenbaum in *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, where Fruchtenbaum argues for the key phrase used in the Olivet Discourse (Mt 24:7) *nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom shall rise against kingdom*, as being a Jewish idiom signifying a worldwide conflict. He writes, “Hence the idiom refers to a worldwide conflict, and this worldwide conflict is the first birth pang, signifying that the last days have begun.” Fruchtenbaum further states, “The first sign or the first birth pang signifying that the last days the age have begun was to be a worldwide conflict coupled with famines and earthquakes. This was fulfilled in 1914-1918.”

I concur that the prophecy by Jesus in Matthew 24:7-8, marked by the simultaneous convergence on a worldwide scale of war, pestilence, famine, and global earthquakes specifically denotes the Sign of the End of the Age and the Beginning of Sorrows – being the initiation of the Birth Pangs. All of these calamities converging together mark the very first Birth Pang which begins the Beginning of Sorrows. The “Sorrows” or Birth Pangs then continue on until the very end – the Revelation of Christ. My disagreement lies firstly, in the claim that World War I marked the initiation of this process, and secondly, in the interpretation that the Birth Pangs do not extend throughout the entire period of the Tribulation.

Therefore, I have to wonder at the accuracy of this perspective. Are the Birth Pangs presently convulsing the world? Did the Birth Pangs really begin with World War I? I have several questions which seem to be unanswered or completely ignored by the proponents of the current Birth Pangs view.

Questions regarding the prophetic Birth Pangs:

* What do the Birth Pangs have to do with the Christian Church – the Body of Christ?
* What do the Birth Pangs have to do with the Church Age – the Age of Grace?
* Do the Birth Pangs really begin while the Church is still present on earth?
* Are the Birth Pangs not part of the end-time Judgments and Wrath of God against the unbelieving world that erupt after the rapture of the Church?
* What is the inherent essence or very nature of birth pangs? Do they not represent a fairly short period of intense sufferings at the very end of the pregnancy? Are they not to be increasingly convulsive and either fairly regularly spaced or rapidly impacting at shorter intervals until the very end?

Do you really want everyone to believe that the Birth Pangs of the End Times are not part of the judgments of God, or the wrath of God against the world in rebellion against Him, but instead have to do with the time frame that the believing Christian Church is the focus of God’s prophetic attention? Do you want everyone to believe that the Birth Pangs are part of the Age of Grace? Or, that the Birth Pangs begin and conclude before the final seven-year time frame of Daniel’s 70th Week itself begins? Do the Birth Pangs really give birth to the Tribulation? Are we to exclude the breaking of the seven Seals, the seven Trumpet Judgments, and the seven Bowl Judgments depicted in the book of Revelation from the Birth Pangs? Will the time frame of the Birth Pangs really last in excess of one hundred years, as they have if they began with World War I?

How is this even possible in the context of the true light of Bible prophecy?

We have to take a step back and ask: What are the Birth Pangs and what is God’s purpose for them? Who or what is the focus of the Birth Pangs? What are the Birth Pangs intended to accomplish?

Nation against Nation & Kingdom against Kingdom: A Jewish idiom – What does it really mean? What is Israel’s relationship to these Birth Pangs and this idiomatic turn of a phrase?

There is a long pregnancy, a short but intense period of birth pangs, followed by a glorious birth. The object being birthed is alive, good, desired, and prophetically critical to God’s plan for His people: the Church, Israel, and the entire world. This object or time being birthed is not bad or evil as the time of the unholy alliance of the satanic trinity during Daniel’s 70th Week will be. How can the time commonly known as the Tribulation be birthed by the Birth Pangs when this time is literally characterized by the evil of Satan? Is it not the essence of the seven Seals, the seven Trumpet Judgments, as well as the seven Bowl Judgments to all be Birth Pangs by their very nature?

The Birth Pangs do not end before the covenant is confirmed which initiates the final seven years. From my understanding of the Bible the Birth Pangs end with the Revelation of Christ and His armies from heaven and the dissolution of the unholy satanic trinity at the very end of the Great Tribulation.

Is it not true that the Age of Grace must end before the Birth Pangs can begin? The Birth Pangs are not directed against the Body of Christ or the Bride of Christ, but instead belong to the specific time of God the Father’s and Jesus Christ’s Day of the LORD. That day begins immediately on the heels of the departing Christians snatched up from the earth at the time of the rapture.

I have recorded my views on the Birth Pangs in several books including: *The Silence is Broken!*, *When God Intervenes*, and *God’s Challenge*. Some of my conclusions include:

God allows natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and acts of terrorism [we can now add Coronavirus] for the purpose of shaking people out of their apathy and complacency regarding their relationships to God. A common question today is: Are these disasters the signs of the End Times, the birth pangs that the prophets and Jesus predicted would come, or the judgments of God that are predicted in the book of Revelation? The answer is – No! The birth pangs have not yet started and will not start until God breaks His silence. All God did with these recent disasters and will continue to do until He is ready to break His silence is to slightly withdraw His restraining hand of protection from portions of the world so as to awaken as many people as possible to His presence. These destructive events are warning signs but they are not God’s judgments of wrath, the final signs, or the birth pangs. But one day that will suddenly change. (*The Silence is Broken!* p. 176)

The end-time judgments of God do not begin until God dramatically breaks His long period of silence. The entire Church Age is part of God’s period of grace which is largely characterized by His silence regarding sin in general and His silence regarding the treatment of Israel by the nations. There are three aspects of prophecy that we need to consider. These are: 1) The Church while it is on earth during the Age of Grace; 2) Israel as a distinct people and nation on earth; and 3) God in heaven. When does God break His silence to the Church? At the one event that clearly closes the Church Age – the rapture – when God sends Christ to call out His command of summons with the trumpet call of God. When does God break His silence to Israel? At the point in time when God intervenes to supernaturally destroy the invasion of Gog and Magog. When does God break His silence in Heaven? At the point in time when God hands the special scroll to Jesus Christ in Revelation 5:7 and Christ breaks the seals on the scroll in Revelation 6:1. These three events share such an overwhelming identity of character that they essentially merge at the same focal point in prophetic time. They become the nexus when one age suddenly, dramatically, and catastrophically metamorphoses into another age – when the present Church Age becomes Israel’s Last Days. It does not matter if the three separate views of this event are separated in time by a few hours or days or even a few weeks. They essentially form a single transforming event which will directly affect every single person on the planet one way or another. The nexus of these three aspects of God’s breaking His silence comprise all of the elements of the beginning of the birth pangs of the End Times. The birth pangs do not begin at any point prior to the junction of these three lines of prophecy. (*The Silence is Broken!* pp. 262-263)

The Day of the Lord will begin at the specific point in time when “nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom…” Some prophecy scholars have concluded that WWI and WWII are the fulfillment of “nation will rise against nation”as a birth pang, but I view them as a continuation of the “wars and rumors of war,” even though they were devastating and somewhat global in scope. World War I and World War II were not part of the birth pangs of Israel’s End Times as Israel had not been reborn as a nation during WWI and WWII. Also, Israel did not participate as a national entity in either war – even though the Jewish people were the target of the holocaust. Israel as a nation or as a land was not the target of either war. When nation rises against nation and kingdom against kingdom, the nation of Israel will be involved in the war – as a target – as the sacrificial target on the altar of Arab-Islamic hatred. The ultimate fulfillment of this reference in the Olivet Discourse will not only see nations invade Israel, but nations fighting against each other outside of the land of Israel. (*The Silence is Broken!* p. 269)

The signs we see today become birth pangs when all of these criteria listed by Jesus take place simultaneously around the world. That is the scale of calamity that will come upon the nations to cause the immediate reaction of people around the world to be one of hiding from God in fear. (*When God Intervenes* p. 124)

This total combination of events has never happened in the history of Israel or the world. This eliminates any consideration of past events such as World War I, or World War II, regardless of the perceived similarity, as constituting the beginning of sorrows. Israel had not been reborn as a nation. That condition is absolutely required before the Day of the LORD, or the Birth Pangs, or Sorrows can begin. There will be a short period of time, after Israel is back in the land as a nation, when there will be war against Israel simultaneous with wars between nations on a global scale (multiple wars between superpowers as well as smaller nations). This will simultaneously be accompanied by earthquakes around the entire planet (global earthquake). At the same time there will be widespread pestilence (contagious diseases spreading in the form of epidemics and pandemics) also on a global scale. Famine will be prevalent on a global scale as well, during and as a result of the major warfare, great earthquakes, and widespread disease, and any other resulting conditions such as massive effects to the weather patterns. (*When God Intervenes* p. 124)

While the beginning of sorrows pointedly marks the very first birth pang, the larger concept of the beginning of sorrows, as a scene in a play, can also be applied to the initial phase of birth pangs that begin with the first pang and extend into the initial phase of the Day of the LORD. Thus, the period of the immediate aftermath of the series of conditions which make up the first birth pang can also be referred to as the “beginning of sorrows.” As intensely as they start, the birth pangs will increase in intensity and severity at the Day progresses. The pangs at the end of the Day of the LORD which climax the time of God’s wrath will be much worse. In this sense the final birth pang or pangs associated with the seventh bowl judgment and the Revelation of Christ comprise the Grand Finale of Sorrows. There will be no more birth pangs after the “Battle of that Great Day of God Almighty.” (*When God Intervenes* p. 125)

Evidence for the Birth Pangs

The position that the Birth Pangs began in 1914 with World War I has been taught as a fact by some, but it is only a theory. What evidence do we have that the prophetic Birth Pangs or the End of the Age really began in 1914 with World War I?

1. We have a Jewish idiom in Mt 24:7 referring to a world or global war. This is accompanied with the direct mention of pestilences, famines, and earthquakes (in diverse places) placing these also on a global scale.
2. The world experienced an unprecedented war from 1914-1918 known as WWI or the war to end all wars (yet it wasn’t!).
3. WWI was immediately followed by a severe form of pestilence known as the Spanish Flu (1918-1919).
4. The world experienced a second world scale war from 1939–1945 known as WWII.
5. Israel was reformed as a nation in 1948 which resulted in a war for its independence (1948-1949). This war resulted in 6,373 Israeli deaths with 7,000 or more Arab deaths.
6. Israel experienced wars in 1956, 1967, 1973, along with other subsequent military conflicts involving Lebanon, and Gaza. The Six-Day War (1967) resulted in about 800 Israelis and about 20,000 Arabs killed, while the 1973 Arab-Israeli (Yom Kippur) War left 2500 to 2800 Israelis and between 8,000 to 18,000 Arabs killed.
7. Earthquakes – When we examine the list of major recorded earthquakes, whether we prioritize by magnitude, by economic impact, or by the extent of casualties, none of the world’s earthquakes from the World War I era of 1914-1918, or the World War II era of 1939-1945 stand out as being anywhere near the worst on any of the lists. The Earthquakes associated with WWI simply are not even close to being severe enough or global enough in scope to qualify for being part of the Birth Pang of Matthew 24:7.
8. Since WWI, the nations of the world have experienced a number of wars and military conflicts, pestilences, famines, earthquakes and other disasters. However, none of them individually or collectively have reached the level of being biblically prophetic of the end times. Instead, they seem to characterize the building pressure of converging precursor lines of prophecy. They do not represent the actual convergence but point to the nearness of the impending convergence which will occur with the first Birth Pang.
9. Evidence from the Old Testament – The prophet Jeremiah argues against the belief that the Birth Pangs end before the Tribulation, particularly the last half of Daniel’s 70th Week which Jeremiah calls the “Time of Jacob’s Trouble.” “Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas, for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.” (Jer 30:6-7) We need to consider another key passage from Isaiah: “Howl ye: for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man’s heart shall melt: And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames. Behold the day of the LORD cometh, cruel with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.” (Isa 13:6-9) This passage links the timing of the beginning of Birth Pangs with the beginning of the Day of the LORD and the simultaneous accompaniment of God’s wrath. This did not take place with WWI or WWII. We are not yet in the Day of the LORD. If anyone cannot see the direct connection between the nation of Israel and the Birth Pangs please study the passage of Isaiah 26:15-18. Israel is the nation that travails – not before it became a nation in 1948, but near the time of its deliverance.

**Alleged Time of the End Birth Pangs**

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| **World Crisis** | **Extent Involved** | **Casualties** |
| World War I | 32 Nations | 15 to 22 Million Deaths |
| Spanish Flu  (H1N1 influenza A virus) | About 500 Million People | 17 to 50 Million Deaths |
| World War II | 58 Nations | 70 to 85 Million Deaths |
| Israel’s  War of Independence | Middle East | 6,373 Israelis  7,000 + Arabs |
| 1967 Six-Day War | Middle East | About 800 Israelis  About 20,000 Arabs |
| 1973 Yom Kippur War | Middle East | 2,500 to 2,800 Israelis  8,000 to 18,000 Arabs |
| 2009-2010 Swine Flu | Many Millions | About 284,000 Deaths |
| 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic | About 5 Million | 323,855 Deaths \* |

\* Coronovirus (covid-19) 2020 – As reported on the John Hopkins COVID-19 Dashboard on 5/20/20 from the 4, 922,139 confirmed cases there had been 323,855 deaths. It is highly suspect that several nations including China are not accurately reporting confirmed cases and deaths. These statistics recorded by the John Hopkins Dashboard are to be taken only as ballpark figures for comparison purposes. They show that presently the Coronavirus is nowhere close to having the impact of the Spanish Flu in 1918-1919.

Where is the real escalating trend that the prophetic Birth Pangs should exhibit? In the immediate aftermath of WWI and the Spanish Flu it would have been logical to wonder if the scale of this was not biblically prophetic in relation to the Birth Pangs. But now it should be quite evident that it was not.

Birth Pangs are supposed to start suddenly with the first pang and then get worse and worse with the intervals between the birth pangs getting shorter and shorter while the birth pangs become more and more frequent right up to the moment of birth! This is the inherent character or nature of birth pangs. This time is referred to as a time of travail.

However, the increase in the numbers of local and regionalized wars and rumors of war following WWI and WWII along with the increase in the various forms of local and regional famines, pestilences, and earthquakes have decreased in their overall scope and intensity. There has not been a WWIII or another pestilence worse than the Spanish Flu. For over seventy years the convulsions of these world crises have not evolved in intensity as should be expected of Birth Pangs, especially as we see the intensity of God’s judgments progress through the book of Revelation.

As a result, the inherent character of birth pangs has literally not manifested itself throughout the world over the past 100+ years. Why? Because the events the world has experienced over the past century beginning with WWI have not comprised the real prophesized Birth Pangs.

From his mindset of believing the Beginning of Sorrows began in 1914 with the war of World War I and the pestilence of the Spanish Flu in 1918, Bill Salus claims that “This sorrowful age has been characterized by other pandemics like ‘Sars’ , ‘Mers’, ‘H1N1’ and now the real whopper, the Coronavirus.” The coronavirus (Covid-19) may be a whopper compared to SARS or MERS, but is not yet a whopper by any stretch of the imagination when compared to the Spanish Flu of 1918-1919. The 2020 Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic is not a birth pang. It does not even come close. However, the world is quickly approaching the time of the Birth Pangs. It is on the cusp of the beginning of the birth pangs – the Beginning of Sorrows, not its ending.

There seems to be a blind unquestioning acceptance among some prophecy teachers regarding the application of World War I to the meaning of the Jewish idiom there will be nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom, but what is the reality?

Does the Sign of the End of the Age manifest itself over 100 years before the actual end of the age? No! Wouldn’t that be ridiculous if it did? I am not looking into the past for the start of the Birth Pangs, I am looking into the near future. The world is on a collision course with the Beginning of Sorrows and the first Birth Pang – not its ending. The Birth Pangs, when they manifest, will be exceedingly worse than anything the world has experienced during the past two thousand years of this Age of Grace.

World War I did not start the Time of the End. The reconstitution of Israel as a nation in 1948 with its War for Independence was not a birth pang. Instead the rebirth of Israel symbolized the new leaves coming out on the prophetic fig tree initiating the Fig Tree Generation which is now 72 years old. The Birth Pangs do not belong to a time prior to or at the beginning of that generation, but to its very end. Only now are we close to the beginning of the Time of the End.

The irony is that while Bill Salus and others are falsely pointing to the end of the Birth Pangs, which have not yet begun, – when the Birth Pangs do suddenly begin the wars depicted in “nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” along with the global scale pestilence, famines, and earthquakes will be falsely interpreted as the end of Armageddon and the Tribulation – with the Gog & Magog invasion of Israel being the core biblical conflict. The Beginning of Sorrows will be interpreted as the End of Sorrows for a while until the prophetic reality of the continuing Birth Pangs finally overwhelms those who dwell upon the earth.

Instead of having a mindset of saying goodbye to Birth Pangs which are still in the world’s future, let’s be prepared to say goodbye to the Church Age and exit this world entirely – Hello Rapture. Come Lord Jesus Come!