

I. THE BEGINNING OF “BIRTH PANGS” AND WORLDWIDE SHAKING (MT. 24)

A. When asked about “signs” preceding His return, Jesus likened 11 major trends to “birth pangs” that would be universal, simultaneous and discernible (Mt. 24:4-8; Mk. 13:5-8; Lk. 21:8-11). Like natural contractions, they ebb and flow, while increasing in frequency and escalating in intensity.

Mt. 24:4 Take heed no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in My name... and deceive many 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes... 8 All [11 of] these are the beginning of sorrows [lit. birth pangs].

B. These 11 “sign trends” are meant to awaken the Church to wholehearted devotion and faithfulness to our assignment in preparation for the escalating glory and crisis of God’s end time restoration plan. *How can the Church prepare if we don’t know what the signs Jesus pointed to actually are?*

1. The 11 sign trends are: *mass deception, propaganda wars, ethnic conflict, international warfare* (economic warfare, lawfare, weaponizing healthcare, etc.), *famines, pestilences* (i.e. COVID-19), *great earthquakes, troubles* (roiling water or mobs Mk. 13:8), *commotions* (chaotic disorder Lk. 21:9), *fearful sights* (terrorist activity Lk. 21:11), *great signs* from heaven (Lk. 21:11). See also Psalm 2:1-3.

2. Due to unfamiliarity, new mothers often experience contractions long before realizing it. *In our immaturity could we be missing the very signs Jesus gave His people to help us prepare for His return?*

3. The pressure of crisis *exposes* that which hides just below the surface of our hearts in times of ease and *expedites* the outcome of our response (Ps. 107; Mal. 3:2-3; Eph. 5:27; Heb. 12:25-29). As in childbirth, these “birth pang” contractions are not designed to *hurt* the Church, but actually *help* the Church.

Mal. 3:2 He is like a refiner’s fire... 3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold... that they may offer... an offering in righteousness. (Eph. 5:27)

C. Scripture describes the *unique dynamics* in the generation of the LORD’s return as *great* and *very terrible* (Joel 2:11, 31; Mal. 4:5; Acts 2:20). The Church experiences the *greatest revival* in history during the *most severe crisis* on earth. Both light/darkness and wheat/tares will increase together (Isa. 60:1-2; Mt. 13:30, 39).

Joel 2:11 For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?

D. Four “crosswinds” or universal realities will converge in *fullness* to create the “perfect storm” that brings in the *great harvest* of souls, comprised of Jews and Gentiles out of every tribe and tongue (Hag. 2:7; Am. 9:12; Acts 15:17; Mt. 24:14; Rev. 14:14-16), brings forth a *glorious Church* in unprecedented unity, purity and power (Eph. 4:13; 5:27; Rev. 19:7; 22:17) and brings down all forms of resistance standing in opposition to God’s loving will, as He establishes an *unshakable kingdom* on the earth (Hag. 2:6-9; Heb. 12:25-29).

E. These four universal realities are *creations groan* (Rom. 8:22), *man’s sin* (Dan. 8:23), *Satan’s rage* (Rev. 12:7-9, 17) and *God’s zeal* displayed in both glory (Acts 2:17-19) and judgment (Hag. 2:6-9; Rev. 15:1).

Heb. 12:26 He has promised... “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” 27 ...indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken... that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

II. THE ESCALATING WORLDWIDE CRISIS IN SOCIETY (PSALM 2)

A. In Psalm 2 David prophesied of a worldwide crisis in society that would crescendo in the generation of the LORD's return. Charles Spurgeon [1834-1892] described Psalm 2 as theatrical drama having four acts.

ACT I Kings' opposition: Seeking to remove the influence of God's Word in culture and society (2:1-3)

ACT II Father's declaration: Exalting Jesus as King and confronting the rebellion against Him (2:4-6)

ACT III Jesus' intercession: Interceding in agreement with the Father's decrees about Him (2:7-9)

ACT IV Holy Spirit's exhortation: Calling people to gratefully engage with God in reverent joy (2:10-12)

B. ACT I: In Act I the kings of the earth (i.e. heads of state) and rulers in society rage in defiant opposition to Jesus' rightful leadership of the earth, along with His ways (i.e. moral standards), as seen in His Word. They seek to completely remove the influence of God's Word from culture and society, including the sanctity of life, marriage and sexuality (vs. 1-3). They describe the Scripture, as "bonds" enslaving them to archaic ways that are no longer relevant and "cords" that hinder their personal freedom and humanity's full potential.

Ps. 2:1 Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth [i.e. heads of state] set themselves, and the rulers [i.e. leaders in society] take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 3 “Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.”

C. The rage in society against Jesus will escalate far beyond people merely *voicing negative opinions* against God's people and His truth to kings and world leaders using their authority and state resources to *war against God's plans and His people* via hate crimes, prison, and even death (Rev. 11:7; 12:17; 13:7; 17:14; 19:19).

Mt. 24:9 They will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations...

D. ACT II: The Father responds by laughing at all those who imagine they can change the fulfillment of God's Word (v. 4) and by declaring His purpose to exalt Jesus as rightful King over the nations (v. 6), while distressing the rebellious kings with judgment (v. 5). The Father is raising up faithful witnesses, while shaking the nations (Hag. 2:6-9; Heb. 12:25-29). At the 7th trumpet loud voices declare Jesus' dominion (Rev. 11:15).

Ps. 2:4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh... 5 He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: 6 “Yet I have set My King [i.e. Jesus] on My holy hill of Zion.”

E. ACT III: Jesus responds to the escalating crisis by *simply agreeing* with the Father's will as expressed in His Word (2:7-9). Why? Because *faith-filled words of agreement* are the *primary way* that God establishes His divine will and releases His governmental power on the earth (Mt. 6:10; Heb. 7:21, 25; 1 Jn. 5:14-15).

Ps. 2:7 “I will declare the decree: The Lord [i.e. Father] has said to Me, ‘You are My Son... 8 Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.’”

F. ACT IV: The Holy Spirit exhorts the kings to take heed and rethink their position, while calling everyone to gratefully engage with God in reverent joy that flows from affection not just duty (vs. 10-12). In context, this includes *speaking God's message* (vs. 5-6) and *engaging in prayer* for His will to be accomplished (v. 8).

Ps. 2:10 Therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. 11 Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice [gratitude] with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way...

III. THE PSALM 2 CRISIS REQUIRES A JOEL 2 RESPONSE, RESULTING IN AN ACTS 2 OUTPOURING!

A. God is calling the Church to understand the *coming worldwide shaking* and *escalating crisis in society*, as well as the *promised victory* in this hour, so that we can respond in a biblical way with great faith. The book of Joel was graciously given to us by the Holy Spirit to teach God's people how to respond to Him in national crisis when there is no human solution, so that God can intervene with great power, mercy and deliverance.

B. Principle: Since God doesn't change (Heb. 13:8) and He shows no partiality (Acts 10:34), what God does with the nation of Israel, He will do to all nations in *like kind*, but *lesser measure* (Rom. 2:8-11).

C. Due to God's merciful nature, He progressively begins to shake the nation that is walking contrary to His ways, giving them time to return to Him and respond in voluntary agreement (Ps. 107; Am. 4:6-12).

Am. 4:6 “I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities and lack of bread in all your places; yet you have not returned to Me,” says the Lord.

D. However, if they refuse to return the pressure continues to escalate in intensity (Lev. 26:14-45; Am. 4:6-12). Since the purpose of God shaking a nation is to remove disagreement with His will (i.e. lawlessness, rebellion), shaking need not occur where agreement with His will and ways is found (Heb. 12:25-29).

Lev. 26:18 ‘And after all this [previous correction], if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. 19 I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. 20 And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit. 21 ‘Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins.

E. The Book of Joel chapter one begins with an unprecedented *natural disaster* (v. 2) and God releasing four waves of *locust* that devour the land (vs. 4-6), followed by *drought* (vs. 8-12), *famine* (vs. 16-18), *economic crisis* and finally *wildfires* that burn up Israel's agricultural reserves (vs. 19-20).

Joel 1:2 Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land! Has anything like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?

F. Joel rightly attributed the crisis to God (v. 15) and calls Israel to gather before Him as a "sacred assembly" in the house of prayer (v. 14). Why? Because of God's earlier promise to Solomon (2 Chr. 7:13-14).

Joel 1:14 Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord. 15 For the day of the Lord is at hand...

2 Chr. 7:13 When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land [i.e. natural disaster] or send pestilence among My people, 14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways [i.e. sacred assembly], then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin and heal their land.

G. Due to Israel's inability to discern God's involvement in the crisis at hand and their lack of giving God a wholehearted response, what initially began as a *natural disaster* (Joel 1) dramatically escalates to a full scale military invasion in God's desire to get their full attention (Joel 2:1-11).

Joel 2:1 Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand: 2 A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations.

1. The historical fulfillment is seen in the ancient Babylonian Empire under King Nebuchadnezzar. There had been no military force that attacked Judah as formidable as the Babylonians up to that time. However, when it adds the phrase “nor will ever be” it telescopes to the end of the age under the final King of Babylon, called the Antichrist of whom the former is only a prophetic foreshadow.

H. God shows us how to *confidently respond* to Him during a national crisis when there is no human remedy, so He can intervene with great power, mercy and deliverance. We are to *turn to Him* with all our heart (2:12-17), asking Him to *relent in mercy* (v. 13) and pray for a *great outpouring* of the Holy Spirit (2:28-31).

Joel 2:12 “Therefore,” says the Lord, “Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” 13 So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm. 14 Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing... 15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; 16 gather the people... the congregation... the elders, gather the children and nursing babes...

1. In light of what's coming God asks us to turn to Him with *all* of our heart. He then describes *fasting, weeping* and *mourning* as practical outward expressions of a genuine inward turning of the heart.

2. The LORD asks us to “rend our hearts” and “return to Him” without hypocrisy, tearing ourselves away from everything that's captured our affections more than Him (v. 13). Rending our heart is a radical and violent act. Similar to Jesus' teaching on metaphorically “plucking out your eyes” or “cutting off your hands” if they cause you to commit sin (Mt. 5:29-30; 18:8-9; Mk. 9:43-48).

Mt. 5:29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

3. Why would we want to make such a costly sacrifice? Because the LORD is gracious, merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness (v. 14).

I. The result of our wholehearted gatherings of prayer with fasting (vs. 12-17) is the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit (vs. 28-32), as seen in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:17-21).

Joel 2:28 “And it shall come to pass afterward [vs. 12-17] that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions... 31 Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord...”

J. On the Day of Pentecost Peter responded to the accusation of drunkenness by pointing to the Joel 2 pattern.

Acts 2:15 For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day [i.e. 9AM]. 16 But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.

1. Notice the qualifying phrase “all flesh” making it available to everyone, but the qualifying word “your” designating the recipients as only those who responded in the way Scripture teaches. In other words, *His response to us* is determined by *our response to Him*. It was 120 gathered together in prayer and fasting in Jerusalem that received the initial outpouring of the Spirit not someone else. In like manner, God will respond to “all flesh” who gather together in the last days according to His prescribed pattern.

2. Jesus’ disciples tarried in unified prayer with fasting in Jerusalem (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:4-8, 14). Doubtless this was according to His instructions through the prophet Joel when He spent 40 days after the resurrection, speaking to them about “things pertaining to the Kingdom” (Acts 1:3).

Acts 1:14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Acts 2:1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.² And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.³ Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

IV. THE MERCIFUL GOD WHO RELENTS FROM HARM AND RELEASES A BLESSING

A. The message of Joel is clear; when God shakes a nation to awaken love there is only *one response* He is looking for – a wholehearted returning to God expressed through individual repentance and corporate gatherings that contend for God’s intervening mercy and outpouring of the Holy Spirit, called “*sacred assemblies*” (Joel 2:12-17). Whenever God’s people gather before Him in sincere faith He considers it sacred.

B. “Who knows” if God will *turn and relent* (lit. change His mind), changing His initial decree and sending blessing instead (1 Sam. 14:6; 2 Sam. 16:12; Joel 2:14; Zeph. 2:3; Am. 5:15; Jon. 1:6; 3:9; Jer. 51:8; Dan. 4:27; Hab. 3:16).

Joel 2:14 Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him...?

C. I marvel that God has it in His heart to reason with men (Isa. 1:18; Joel 2:17), even “changing His mind” or changing the outcome based upon our wholehearted response of agreement with His heart, will and ways.

Jer. 18:7 The instant I speak concerning a nation to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, 8 if that nation... turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.

D. There are *two stages* in divine judgments:

1. A decree of judgment is established in God's heavenly court (1 Kgs. 22:19-23; 2 Chr. 18:18-22; Dan. 4:13-17; 7:9-10, 22, 26; Zeph. 2:1-3).

Dan. 7:9 *The Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame... 10 The court was seated, and the books were opened.*

2. The decree is issued in *fullness*, releasing angels to execute judgment (Ezek. 9; Dan. 7:22, 26; Rev. 8-9; 15-16), or it can be *minimized* (2 Sam. 24:10-14), *delayed* until future evaluation (1 Kgs. 21:21-29; 2 Chr. 34:22-28), *reversed* after release (2 Kgs. 20:1-11; 2 Chr. 7:14; 33:9-13; Isa. 38:1-8) or *averted altogether* (Gen. 18:22-33; Ex. 32: 9-14; Jer. 18:7-10; Ezek. 18:21-22, 27-28; 33:10-16; Am. 7:1-6; Jon. 3:4-10).

Zeph. 2:1 *Gather yourselves together [sacred assembly]... 2 before the decree [of judgment] is issued... 3 Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth... Seek righteousness... it may be that you will be hidden [protected from judgment] in the day of the Lord's anger.*

E. Due to the substantial agreement of God's people there will be “pockets of mercy” where individuals, cities and whole geographic regions are “hidden” (i.e. protected) during times of judgment (Isa. 26:20-21; Ezek. 9:4-5; Zeph. 2:3; Am. 4:7; Hab. 3:16-19). Some examples are Noah and his family during a time of worldwide judgement (Gen. 6-9), Israel in Goshen during the ten plagues of Egypt (Ex. 7-12), the harlot Rahab during Jericho’s destruction (Josh. 6:17) and the 144,000 sealed Israelites in the end times (Rev. 7:1-8; 9:4).

Ex. 8:22 *In that day [of shaking] I will set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell... in order that you may know that I am the Lord... 23 I will make a difference between My people and your people.*

Amos 4:7 *I also withheld rain from you... I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city.*

F. Where God finds no agreement with His heart, will and ways He sends the fullness of judgment to remove rebellion in His timing (Gen. 15:16). Nevertheless, in mercy the LORD still seeks intercessors to stand in agreement with Him (Gen. 18:16-32; Ezek. 22:30), so that future judgment can be *averted* (Ex. 32:7-14; Num. 16:1-41; 16:41-50; Ps. 106:21-23; Jer. 18:7-8; Am. 7:1-6) and past judgment might be *reversed* (2 Chr. 7:14).

2 Chr. 7:14 *If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin and heal their land.*

1. **Almolonga, Guatemala** - This is the “*Big Carrots*” community made famous by The Sentinel Group’s widely-distributed Transformations video. Formerly a town of idolatrous and drunken brawlers, Almolonga is now a bustling, Christ-centered farming center. With 85% of its 19,000 inhabitants claiming a born- again experience, the secular media has dubbed it the “City of God”.

2. **Fijian Islands** - The islands once filled with idolatry, witchcraft and rebellion are now abundant in the miraculous. Families that were barren for 10-20 years are now having *children* (some at 50 years of age), once low-yield *fruit trees* are now producing fruit 12 months out of the year, a dead *coral reef* has been made alive again by a pillar of fire and is teaming with *fish* that have been absent for over 50 years, polluted streams of *water* have been restored (without fresh water upstream or downstream), large crops of unplanted *vegetables* suddenly began growing. Recently, under the village of Nuku (previous marijuana harvest), scientists have confirmed the largest mineral deposit of *gold* in Oceania.

V. THE VITAL ROLE OF INTERCESSORS IN CHANGING HISTORY

A. A national disaster can be stopped in response to the wholehearted agreement of God's people. God is looking to intervene in crisis and change the disaster that would have occurred (Gen. 18:22-32; Ex. 32: 9-14; 2 Chr. 34:22-28; Jer. 18:7-10; 51:6-8; Ezek. 18:21-28; 33:10-14; Dan. 4:27; Am. 5:14-15; 7:1-6; Jon. 3:4-10; Mal. 3:16-4:6).

Ezek. 22:30 So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.

1. Abraham reasoned with God on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:20-33; Amos 3:7).

Gen. 18:17 And the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing... ?” 23 And Abraham said, “Would You destroy the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there were fifty righteous... ? 25 Far be it from You... Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” 26 So the LORD said, “If I find... fifty righteous... then I will spare all the place for their sakes... ” 32 Suppose ten should be found there?” And He said, “I will not destroy it for the sake of ten.” 33 So the LORD went His way...

2. Moses stood in the gap multiple times for Israel (Ex. 32:7-14; Num. 16:1-41; 16:41-50; Ps. 106:21-23).

Ex. 32:10 “Let Me alone, that... I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.” 11 Then Moses pleaded... “Why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people... ? 12 Why should the Egyptians... say, ‘He brought them out to harm them... ? Turn from Your fierce wrath... 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel... to whom You swore by Your self... ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven... ’” 14 So the LORD relented from the harm He said He would do to His people.

3. Amos appealed to God's mercy and averted the judgment of locusts and fire in Israel (Am. 7:1-6).

Amos 7:1 The Lord GOD showed me: Behold, He formed locust swarms at the beginning of the late crop... 2 I said: “O Lord GOD, forgive, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, for he is small!” 3 So the LORD relented... “It shall not be,” said the LORD. 4 Thus the Lord GOD showed me: Behold, the Lord GOD called for conflict by fire, and it consumed the great deep and devoured the territory. 5 Then I said: “O Lord GOD, cease, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, for he is small!” 6 So the LORD relented concerning this. “This also shall not be,” said the Lord GOD.

4. God relented from Nineveh's judgment due to their wholehearted response of prayer with fasting (Jon. 3:1-10; Mt. 12:41; Lk. 11:32).

Jonah 3:4 [Jonah] cried... “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” 5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast... from the greatest to the least of them... 7 by decree of the king... let neither man nor beast... taste anything... 8 and cry mightily to God... 9 Who can tell if God will turn and relent? 10 Then God saw their works and... relented from the disaster...

B. Leaders must “blow the trumpet” in times of crisis by boldly proclaiming the necessity and impact of sacred assembly's on God's heart to access His mercy, power and the restoration available through our wholehearted response.

1. These assemblies are sacred to the LORD, as we set aside times for the people of God to gather in corporate prayer with fasting and turn to Him in repentance for all compromise.
 2. Fasting doesn't earn us God's favor, but *tenderizes our hearts* to feel more of what He feels and *positions us* under the waterfall of His grace to receive more from Him, having a deeper impact on our hearts at an accelerated pace.
- C. The LORD is setting “watchmen” across the earth (Isa. 62:6-7) who seek to know Him (Ps. 27:4), to understand His plans (Jer. 23:20) and commit to contend in fervent intercession until His will is fully manifest on earth (Isa. 62:1; Mt. 6:10). This includes the salvation of Israel and the redemption of Jerusalem.
- Isa. 62:1 For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns... 6 [Therefore] I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, 7 and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.***
- D. Persevering in day and night prayer is required for the full release of worldwide justice. This describes the heart of the Jacob generation (Ps. 24:6) who will continue to wrestle with God in prayer and not let go until His blessing is released (Gen. 32:22-30).

Lk. 18:1 He spoke... that men always ought to pray and not lose heart... 7 And shall God not avenge [i.e. release justice for] His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you He will avenge [i.e. release justice for] them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"