

# The First Half of the Tribulation

📖 Matthew 24:4-8

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Last time we introduced the fifth discourse in Matthew, Matthew 24-25, which is popularly known as the Olivet Discourse because the location it was given was the Mt of Olives. However, I prefer to refer to it as *The Discourse on Kingdom Coming* because it gives an overview of the conditions in the world that will lead inevitably to the Second Coming and establishment of the kingdom. We said last time that it should be interpreted within the context of the prophetic picture revealed in the OT of four successive Gentile kingdoms that go to judgment and are replaced by the kingdom of God and in terms of the immediate context of Matthew where the kingdom is offered to the nation Israel, rejected and postponed until a generation of Israel receives Jesus as the King. Jesus is giving His last words to Israel who will not see Him until they say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." It is important to point out that the discourse has nothing to do with the Church, Christians or the rapture, all subjects that belong to the Upper Room Discourse and are the first words to the Church. So the Olivet Discourse deals strictly with Israel and how nations treat Israel in the time immediately preceding the kingdom's establishment and the judgments that precede that kingdom. This approach is known as futurism. In particular we are dispensational futurists. We make a distinction because not all futurists are dispensational. Within dispensational futurism there are differences in how the discourse is viewed. Walvoord doesn't agree with Ryrie who doesn't agree with Toussaint who doesn't agree with Fruchtenbaum who doesn't agree with Pentecost. There are a large range of views when it comes to the specifics. Some of these men blend historicism with futurism, meaning they see some of the verses as having already been fulfilled in the present age and some of them as still future. Others are strict futurists, relegating all the details to the future Tribulation. You may not care what these men thought, you may just want to know what I think, but looking at the views of these men will help familiarize you with the content of the discourse. At the end I'll give my view and we'll continue our exposition.

The first view on your chart is that of John Walvoord, unarguably the greatest prophecy scholar in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He views vv 4-14 as general signs of the present age and vv 15-28 as specific signs of the future tribulation. This is a blend of historicism and futurism. He expressed it by saying that Matthew 24:4-14 is "describing the general characteristic of the age leading up to the end, while at the same time recognizing that

the prediction of the difficulties, which will characterize the entire period between the first and second coming of Christ, are fulfilled in an intensified form as the age moves on to its conclusion. If Matthew 24:4-14 deals with general signs, then verses 15-26 may be considered specific signs.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, 24:4-14 deals with general signs throughout the present age all the way to the second coming and 15-26 deal with specific signs in the future tribulation when these signs intensify. He points out that things like false Christ’s and wars and rumors of wars and famines and earthquakes have occurred during the present age and some have intensified. He points out that false prophets have plagued the Church and that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached more and more as the end of the age approaches. In general, his idea is that all these things will intensify through the entire Church age and get really bad when He comes. It’s an interesting idea. Walvoord was, of course, the greatest prophecy scholar of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but he held a strange view of some things. For example, he held that there were no seal judgments in the first half of the tribulation, the seals, trumpets and bowls were all in the second half of the tribulation. I don’t know anyone else who still holds that view today. His reasoning was that Israel is under a peace treaty in the first three and one half years and so he concluded there couldn’t be any disturbances from the seal judgments. However, there is a difference between having geopolitical peace and geophysical peace. Israel will have geopolitical peace in the first half of the tribulation, they will not geophysical peace. Overall I think this view is weak. First, verse 8 says these are merely the beginning of birth pangs. Birth pangs come only in the final hours of a pregnancy. It does not fit the birth pangs metaphor to stretch them out over the entire Church age. It is better to view them as things that occur in the future tribulation. Second, Walvoord specifically pointed to an increase in earthquakes as evidence for his view. However, an increase in earthquake *data* does not mean an increase in earthquakes. As more and more seismographs have been installed around the world more and more data about earthquakes have been captured. That does not mean there are more earthquakes, only that we are detecting more earthquakes because of more widely dispersed seismographs. Steve Austin has shown from the data held by the National Earthquake Information Center that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was an overall slight decrease in earthquake frequency and that during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a slight decrease in earthquakes registering 7.0 or greater on the Richter scale, relative to the earlier half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> This slightly decreasing pattern is consistent with the creationist idea that there has been an exponential decline in tectonic movement and volcanism since Noah’s Flood. Therefore, the claim that we are seeing gradual increases of the things in Matthew 24:4-8 is simply not true. The next major increase in earthquakes will occur during the first half of the Tribulation when these things explode on a global scale.

The second view on the chart is that of Fruchtenbaum. He says that vv 4-6 deal with general characteristics of the Church age, namely false Christ’s and local wars, vv 7-8 deal with the sign that marks the end of the age which is interpreted as WWI and WWII, vv 9-14 deal with the first half of the tribulation and vv 15-20 the events of the second half of the tribulation. This is also a blend of historicism and futurism. This view has some problems. First, he says verse 6 is describing local wars whereas verse 7 is describing global wars. The problem is

that verse 7 begins with an explanatory *γὰρ*. Jesus is not introducing a change of subject in verse 7 but an explanation of verse 6. The wars may be either local or global but they can't be one and the other. Second, vv 9-14 describe hatred and persecution of the Jews but that won't happen until the second half of the tribulation. Third, it's a strict chronology and that doesn't fit Jewish ways of writing.

The third view on the chart is that of Toussaint. vv 4-6 deal with the disciples, vv 7-14 are general picture of the period just before His coming and vv 15-22 describe the specific sign that will signal that the end is near. This is also a blend of historicism and futurism. I don't have any one statement of his but this is what I gathered from his book. It's definitely better than some of the other views. One problem is the same as Fruchtenbaum. He makes a distinction between vv 4-6 as dealing with the disciples in the 1<sup>st</sup> century and vv 7-14 dealing with the general period just before His coming in the future tribulation. The problem with that is verse 7 begins with an explanatory *γὰρ* and so signals that verse 7 is an explanation of verse 6. You can't separate them by over 1900 years. Nor can you say one is local and the other is global. They are either both local events or both global.

The fourth view on the chart is that of Ryrie and Ice. It says that vv 4-14 deal with the first half of the tribulation and vv 15-28 deal with the second half of the tribulation. This is much better in that it is a purely futuristic view. If you have the Ryrie Study Bible look at the end of the note on 24:3. "Verses 4-14 list characteristics of the first half of the tribulation period, whereas verses 15-28 deal with the second half." This view has in its favor a strict chronology leading all the way to the second coming. However, it has some short-comings. First, Jews rarely wrote in strict chronologies. For example, Gen 1 gives a chronology of creation but then Gen 2 backs up and gives more details about the most important day of creation, the sixth day. This is an oriental style of writing that is much like modern journalist style where a journalist will give a general overview and then back up and highlight important details. This seems to be Matthew's style as we will see. Second, it's difficult to imagine that vv 9-14 are the first half of the tribulation since it describes Israel being hated and persecuted by all nations when Daniel revealed that Israel would enjoy peace during the first half of the tribulation (Dan 9:27). Nevertheless, the view of Ryrie and Ice is possible and it is my second favorite view but the fifth view may be better.

The fifth view is that of Pentecost, Barbieri, Showers, and others. It states that vv 4-8 deal with the first half of the tribulation, vv 9-26 deal with the second half of the tribulation. V 15 goes back and describes the sign that the second half of the tribulation in v 9 is beginning which will culminate with the second coming in vv 29-31. This is also a purely futurist view and I have thought that this is the best view for a long time. Pentecost says, "There seems to be evidence to support the view that the first half of the week is described in verses 4-8. The parallelism between verses 4-8 and Revelation 6 seem to indicate that the first half of the tribulation is here described... There are indications that verses 9-26 describe the events of the last half of the week. The abomination of desolation (24:15) is clearly stated by Daniel (9:27) to appear in the middle of the week and continue to the end of the period. The word "then" in verse 9 seems to introduce the great persecutions against

Israel that were promised them and were described in Revelation 12:12-17, where John reveals that this persecution will last for the last half of the tribulation period (Rev. 12:14).<sup>3</sup> This view overcomes most, if not all the difficulties. First, it observes that vv 4-8 are paralleled by the six seals in Rev 6. Barbieri says, "The events described in verses 4-8 correspond somewhat to the seven seals in Revelation 6....That period will be characterized by (a) false Christs (Matt. 24:4-5; cf. Rev. 6:1-2; the first seal is Antichrist), (b) **wars and rumors of wars** (Matt. 24:6; cf. Rev. 6:3-4; the second seal is warfare) in which nations **will rise up against** each other on a global scale (Matt. 24:7a), and (c) unusual disturbances in nature including **famines** (v. 7b; cf. Rev. 6:5-6; the third seal is famine; the fourth and fifth seals are death and martyrdom [Rev. 6:7-11]) **and earthquakes** (Matt. 24:7b; cf. Rev. 6:12-14; the sixth seal is an earthquake)."<sup>4</sup> So while things like false Christ's, wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes occur during the present age on a local scale (even WWI and II were not truly global events), it is a fact of history that they have occurred in every age. The distinguishing mark of their occurrence is not that they will occur but that they will occur on a global scale. Second, when these things occur on a truly global scale then the "birth pangs" will have come. When birth pangs come it is not yet the end but they are precursors to the end. Once they begin they will continue inevitably and in increasing intensity until the kingdom is born. Third, verses 9-14 describe Israel under tribulation. Daniel 7:21 and 25 indicate that Israel will be persecuted for three and a half years at the end of anti-Christ's reign. Dan 8:24-25 discusses the degree to which he will destroy Israel. Rev 12:12-17 confirm that Israel's persecution will last for three and a half years during the last half of the tribulation. Therefore, verses 9-14 describe the second half of the tribulation. Fourth, the abomination of desolation in Matt 24:15 is a major marker for when Israel's time of difficulty begins. Dan 9:27 says that the anti-Christ will break his covenant in the middle of the week by committing the abomination of desolation. That is what Jesus is quoting. This is the signal for Israel to get the hell out of dodge. It will occur in the land with Israel regathered and a temple rebuilt. Fifth, it is characteristic of Jewish writings to move forward with a chronology, as in vv 4-8 covering the first half and then vv 9-14 the second half of the Tribulation, and then go back to highlight major milestones. Verse 15, the abomination of desolation is the major milestone. In reality it will occur at verse 9 as the sign that the Jews will now come under persecution. Verse 9 begins with the word "then." It is the adverb *τοτε*. It's an adverb of time which can be translated "at that time." That time is the mid-point of the tribulation when verse 15, "you see the abomination of desolation..." This chronology followed by backing up to cite major milestones is a very common way for Jews to write. Think about it. How is the creation account written? How is the battle of Gog and Magog written? How is the Book of Revelation written? They all follow chronology and then go back and cite major details. That is what is happening here. Vv 4-8 is the first half and it says this is not the end, vv 9-14 is the second half and it says this is the end, v 15 is the sign that marks the beginning of the second half in verse 9 when the Jews need to escape to the mountains. This view means everything here is still future from our standpoint today.

Now for our exposition. We said that Jesus had just uttered 23:38, "your house is being left to you desolate" as referring to the destruction of the temple that was still under construction. This probably shocked the disciples

so that in 24:1, as “Jesus came out from the temple and was going away” “His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.” The buildings were still incomplete yet they were already magnificent by any standard. To them it was unthinkable that this temple would be destroyed and so they pointed the buildings out in order to get further clarification. In 24:2 He confirms what He said before, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.” At this they must have been traumatized. Indeed, the temple that would not be complete until AD64 and which was so majestic would be destroyed. It came to fulfillment in AD70 when the Roman soldiers pried loose every stone upon the temple mount and cast them into the streets below. At this point the disciples were dumbfounded. Some time elapses before 24:3 while they walked from the temple environs, across the Kidron Valley and up the Mount of Olives. In verse 3, “As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately. The parallel in Mark 13:3 says four disciples came to Him, “Peter and Andrew and James and John.” They said to Him, “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age.” This is really two questions but in their mind all the ideas were connected from the sequence of events described in Zech 14. The first question deals with the timing of the destruction of the temple. Matthew does not record Christ’s answer, nor does Mark, only Luke. Luke says that Jesus answered by saying that when Jerusalem is surrounded by armies they should know that its desolation is near. When that happened near AD70 the Jewish believers knew they needed to escape and when the Roman armies retreated to gather supplies for the long siege they did escape. Luke answers that first question. Matthew was more interested in the second question which deals with the sign of Messiah’s coming and the end of the present age. In Jewish thought there were only two ages; first, the age leading up to Messiah and second, the messianic age itself so they want to know the sign of Messiah’s coming which will end the present age and usher in the messianic age, which is the kingdom. That’s what these Jews are interested in. They’re not interested in anything like a church. That’s not even on their radar at this time. This is about the hope of Israel.

In 24:4 Jesus begins to answer. Verses 4-8 describe the first half of the Tribulation. Barbieri says, “In this section (Matt. 24:4–8) He described the first half of the seven-year period preceding His second coming.”<sup>5</sup> The descriptions here are paralleled by the seal judgments in Rev 6. The first verse is introductory. **Jesus answered and said to them, “See to it that no one misleads you.”** The pronoun **you** refers to His disciples but probably has a broader application to all of Jesus’ disciples. Matthew wrote to Jewish disciples. The important thing is that Jewish disciples not be **misled** by certain things that they may interpret as signs indicating the end but are really not. The Greek word **misleads** is *πλαναω*. The noun is *πλανη* and we get our word “planets” from this word. The ancients at one time thought that the planets wandered aimlessly and so the word came to be used metaphorically for someone who is wandering aimlessly. Jesus’ disciples should not wander aimlessly. When it’s used as a metaphor it’s best to translate this word as “deceives.” Jesus is saying, “See to it that no one deceives you.” This implies that there is great occasion to be deceived and clearly this passage is dominated by the theme of deception in the last days. Note in verse 5; many will be deceived by false Christ’s, in verse 11; many will be

deceived by false prophets; in verse 24 great signs and wonders will be done by false Christ's and false prophets in order to deceive. Very clearly then, a time in history is coming when there will be great occasion for Jewish disciples to be deceived into thinking that the Messiah has come or is about to come. They should **see to it that no one** deceives them.

24:5 explains, notice the explanatory *γάρ*, which is translated **For. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many.** In other words, there will be many false Christ's coming during the first half of the Tribulation. Usually people only think of the anti-Christ but actually there will be many anti-Christ's coming, out of which one will arise to world power. This is paralleled by the first seal. When the Lamb broke the first seal John says, "I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer." The first horseman is often interpreted as the anti-Christ waging cold war. However, if he is the anti-Christ then what individual is the individual on the red horse, the pale horse and the black horse? Do you see the problem? If you identify rider one as an individual, then you are put in the awkward position of needing to identify each of the later horsemen as individuals too. It is probably better to allow Matthew 24:5 to interpret the first horseman as representing many false Christ's. McLean says, "The synoptics do not state that the Antichrist is the first sign of the birth pangs but that the pseudo-messiahs are. It may be better to view the first rider as a general symbolic reference to pseudo-messiahs who stir up the people to war and insurrection. The rider is said to go out" conquering and to conquer," but open warfare is not present until the second seal."<sup>6</sup> So 24:5 is saying that in the future Tribulation many false Christ's are going to come and many will be deceived by these false Christ's but Jewish disciples in that time should not be deceived by any of them because I am not one among them.

In 24:6 Jesus says, **You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end.** Their question was about **the end** but note that these things are **not yet the end.** The Jews will be **hearing of wars and rumors of wars** in the first half of the Tribulation but that's not the end. This is paralleled by the second seal. When the Lamb broke it John says, "And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him." You see that this rider is not any one individual but it is many individuals waging war. The riders are not individuals but personifications of all who engage in the activity. The second seal is describing the activity of war and Jesus said in the Olivet discourse, **You will be hearing of wars and rumors of war.** At this time the Jews will be under the geo-political protection of the anti-Christ and so will not face war but they will hear about them. Thomas Ice says this means, "There will be war that those in Jerusalem will see themselves and those further away that they will only hear about."<sup>7</sup> While many think that wars and rumors of wars are signs that the end is near, Jesus says that is **not yet the end.**

Instead He says **See that you are not frightened.** So in addition to not being deceived they are not to be **frightened.** These **wars and rumors of wars** will certainly be frightening and yet the Jewish disciples should not

be **frightened**. Why not? The reason stated is **for those things must take place**. The word **must** is  $\delta\epsilon\iota$ , a particle of necessity. It is emphatic. In other words, these things must take place. There is no other route to get to the kingdom. Therefore, they should not be frightened by them? But how does knowing they must happen calm one's fright? Simply because he who knows the plan of God is unfolding is reassured that God is in control. Meyer says, "The reflection that it is a matter of necessity in pursuance of the divine purpose (xxvi. 54), is referred to as calculated to inspire a calm and reassured frame of mind."<sup>8</sup> Simply put then, a believer can have confidence in the face of a chaotic world if he knows that the plan of God is unfolding before his very eyes.

To make sure they understand what things do not signal the end Jesus concludes verse 6 with the words, **but that is not yet the end**. Wars are not a sign that the end is near. There have always been wars since the fall of man. Verse 7 explains that the wars in verse 6 are the same as the wars in verse 7. They will not just be local wars but they will be widespread global wars. M'Neile says, "The horrors described are not local disturbances, but are spread over the known world; nations and kingdoms are in hostility with one another."<sup>9</sup> Even world wars are not the sign of **the end**.

24:7 begins with an explanatory  $\gamma\alpha\rho$ , translated **For**, and therefore explains verse 6. **For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs**. The word translated **nation** is  $\epsilon\theta\nu\omicron\varsigma$  and usually refers to a distinct people group such as the Americans or the Chinese. During the first half of the tribulation there will still be national fervor and therefore **nation will rise against nation** in war. Further, **kingdom** will rise **against kingdom**. The word translated **kingdom** is  $\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\iota\alpha$  and refers to a realm of rule and so describes an organization of nations into a pact such as NATO in order to secure certain interests by political and military means. So kingdom against kingdom is not the same as nation against nation but points to larger scope wars where alliances of nations war against other alliances of nations. While it may be tempting to interpret these as WWI and II it is better to interpret these as wars that will occur in the first half of the Tribulation. Thomas Ice says, "These wars of the tribulation are described in verse 7 as, nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. This description depicts multiple struggles taking place on various levels; international conflict will be raging all around. Nations fighting nations, such as if the national entities of France and Germany fought one another. Kingdom against kingdom, such as if NATO were to fight the former Warsaw pact nations. This is the kind of geopolitical conflict depicted in Daniel and Revelation, which are within the context of a future tribulation."<sup>10</sup> So while some have interpreted these as fulfilled in WWI and WWII and those as the sign that the end is near it seems better to see the parallel with the second seal in Rev 6 and to assign these world wars to the first half of the Tribulation.

At the end of 24:7 we also read of **famines in various places**. **Famines** are a natural result of war but these may not be merely natural results but supernatural judgments since the third seal describes famine. When the Lamb broke the third seal John says, "I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, "A

quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine.” This describes the onset of famine. A quart of wheat was the equivalent of one meal of nutritional value and yet the cost was a denarius, an entire day’s wage. Barley had much less nutritional value and so people will be able to buy more barley for the same amount of money but it will not be sufficient nutritional value. The description is of the onset of famine. The oil and wine will not be affected because demand for these items will be low. People will be wanting food. The bottom line is that the world will see the onset of global famine in the first half of the Tribulation. Therefore, it is not the sign of **the end**.

The end of verse 7 also mentions **earthquakes**. Many commentators interpret this as an increase in earthquakes in the present and argue that they are increasing in quantity. What has actually increased is not the number or intensity of earthquakes but the amount of data we have collected about earthquakes. This is because more seismographs have been installed around the world. Therefore, we are in a better position to detect earthquakes. As mentioned earlier, research from the 20th century showed a slight decrease in earthquake frequency and intensity. News reports may give people the opposite perception but it is nothing more than perception. The fact is the earth’s largest earthquakes occurred during the global flood of Noah. The years following the flood would have seen the aftershocks on a global scale but ever since the flood there has been an exponential decline in tectonic plate movement and therefore earthquakes and volcanoes have been decreasing to a local scale for the last 4300 years. The decline will continue until the next truly global earthquake shakes the earth in the first half of the Tribulation. This is paralleled by the sixth seal where John says, “I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake...every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” That is a giant earthquake like nothing anyone alive has ever seen. Thus, earthquakes today are not a sign of end-times. The next thing that will happen is the rapture. And then, even when this global earthquake occurs in the first half of the tribulation Jesus says in verse 7 that it is not the sign of the end. It will be something that simply has to take place to get to the end.

In 24:8 Jesus says, **But all these things are the beginning of birth pangs**. So while they are not the sign of the end they **are the beginning of birth pangs**. This means they are significant indicators that the end is near. The metaphor of birth pangs is derived from the literal birth pangs faced by a woman in child-bearing. Fruchtenbaum says, “It refers to the series of birth pangs that a woman undergoes before giving birth to a baby. The prophets pictured the last days as a series of birth pangs before the birth of the new Messianic age.” With that definition in mind let’s break it down. First, the OT depicted the time just prior to Israel’s salvation as a period of birth pangs and related it to the time of Jacob’s trouble. Jer 30:5-7, “For thus says the Lord, ‘I have heard a sound of terror, Of dread, and there is no peace. <sup>6</sup>Ask now, and see If a male can give birth. Why do I see every man *With* his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? And *why* have all faces turned pale? <sup>7</sup>Alas! for that day is great, There is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob’s distress, But he will be saved from it.” The description here is of full labor in distinction from beginning labor. It refers to the second half of the Tribulation. The first half of the Tribulation is the beginning of the labor. When it escalates into full labor every man of Israel

will be as helpless as a woman in childbirth. But the conclusion of the matter is that Israel will be saved from it. Second, the birth pangs are often associated with the eschatological day of the Lord as judgment of a judicial character effecting the heavens and earth. Isa 13:6-13, "Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. <sup>7</sup>Therefore all hands will fall limp, And every man's heart will melt. <sup>8</sup>They will be terrified, Pains and anguish will take hold of *them*; They will writhe like a woman in labor, They will look at one another in astonishment, Their faces aflame. <sup>9</sup>Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. <sup>10</sup>For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises And the moon will not shed its light. <sup>11</sup>Thus I will punish the world for its evil And the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud And abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. <sup>12</sup>I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold And mankind than the gold of Ophir. <sup>13</sup>Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, And the earth will be shaken from its place At the fury of the Lord of hosts In the day of His burning anger." Third, the Church is not destined for seeing these birth pains. Immediately following the passage on the rapture in 1 Thess 4:13-18 Paul says this in 1 Thess 5:1-3, "Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. <sup>2</sup>For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup>While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape." The birth pangs will fall upon them, not us. Verse 9 tells us we are not destined for wrath but for obtaining salvation. The salvation referred to here is deliverance at the rapture. But they will not escape. Fourth, Jewish legends based on the study of the OT concluded that just before Messiah comes a period of great travail will come upon the world from heaven above and the earth beneath. Patai in his book *The Messiah Texts* says, "...the pangs of the Messianic times are imagined as having heavenly as well as earthly sources and expressions. From Above, awesome cosmic cataclysms will be visited upon the earth: conflagrations, pestilence, famine, earthquakes, hail and snow, thunder and lightning. These will be paralleled by evils brought by men upon themselves: insolence, robbery, heresy, harlotry, corruption, oppression, cruel edicts, lack of truth, and no fear of sin. All this will lead to internal decay, demoralization, and even apostasy. Things will come to such a head that people will despair of Redemption. This will last seven years. And then, unexpectedly, the Messiah will come."<sup>11</sup> So horrible was this time immediately preceding Messiah that many Jewish sages expressed that they did not wish to see Messiah. Ula said, "May he come, but I do not wish to see him." Rava likewise, "May he come, but I do not wish to see him." Rav Yosef said, "May he come and may I sit in the shadow of his ass's droppings."<sup>12</sup> Fifth, nevertheless, the Jews still had a Messianic hope. As Patai said, "...both the people and its religious leaders continued to hope for the coming of the Messiah, much like a woman who hopes and waits for the birth of her child, even though she knows that she will have to go through severe pangs of childbirth before she can enjoy the pleasures of motherhood."<sup>13</sup> Randall Price's study of the birth pangs concludes with these fitting words, "The birth pangs are significant in the timing of the Tribulation as revealed by Jesus in the Olivet discourse (Matt. 24:8). Jesus' statement of the "birth pangs" is specifically that the events of the first half of the Tribulation (vv 4-7) are merely the "beginning," with the expectation of greater birth

pangs in the second half (the "Great Tribulation"). Based on this analogy, the entire period of the seventieth week is like birth pangs. As a woman must endure the entire period of labor before giving birth, so Israel must endure the entire seven-year Tribulation. The time divisions of Tribulation are also illustrated by the figure, for just as the natural process intensifies toward delivery after labor ends, so here the Tribulation moves progressively toward the second advent (vv. 30-31), which takes place "immediately after" the Tribulation ends (v. 29). As there are two phases of the birth pangs (beginning labor and full labor), so the seven years of Tribulation are divided between the less severe and more severe experiences of terrestrial and cosmic wrath, as revealed progressively in the Olivet discourse and the judgment section of Revelation 6-19.<sup>14</sup> With this I could not agree more. The birth pangs are the metaphor of sudden global cataclysms that intensify until the kingdom of God comes. They are limited to the seven-year Tribulation. They are not spread out over the Church age. They do not begin with WWI and WWII. Starting that early spreads out the birth pangs over too long a period of time and when a woman has the beginning of birth pangs they quickly escalate to hard birth pangs and she gives birth to a baby within only a few hours. Further, while one may argue that false Christ's have appeared through Church history as well as famines and earthquakes and wars, the parallels with Rev 6 are too precise to generalize. Alva McClain says, "It should be noted here that in the great eschatological discourse of our Lord, there is an exact forecast of the judgments and their sequence under the first six seals of Revelation 6."<sup>15</sup> This is what I have been arguing all along. If it be objected that not all of the seals are described in detail and neither are the trumpets or the bowls the reply is that this is a miniature apocalypse and therefore only gives a general sketch of the time period, but with sufficient detail to recognize the correlation when John wrote the Revelation.

In the end the description in Matt 24:4-8 is of the first half of the tribulation. It will be characterized by an unprecedented time of false Messiahs, global wars between nations and coalitions of nations, global famines and a global earthquake along with other geophysical catastrophes in the heavens above and the earth beneath that are revealed in the Book of Revelation. These things must take place but this is not the sign that the end of this age is upon us. Nevertheless, they are the beginning of birth pangs that will intensify with the result that this age will end, Messiah will return and establish the kingdom. May we be grateful that we are not destined for this period of wrath but for the rapture, the blessed hope of meeting our Lord and Savior who delivers us away from the wrath to come.

Questions?

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<sup>1</sup> John Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p 183.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.icr.org/article/424/>

<sup>3</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, p 278-9.

<sup>4</sup> Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 76.

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<sup>5</sup> Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 76.

<sup>6</sup> John McLean, Chronology and Sequential Structure of John's Revelation in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Ice and Demy, p 323.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/an-interpretation-of-matthew-24-25-part-6>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/an-interpretation-of-matthew-24-25-part-6>

<sup>9</sup> Alan Hugh M'Neile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: MacMillan, 1915), p. 346.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/an-interpretation-of-matthew-24-25-part-6>

<sup>11</sup> Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts*, p 95-6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>14</sup> J. Randall Price, Old Testament Tribulation Terms in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Ice and Demy, p 72.

<sup>15</sup> Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p 455.