AFTER THE BEGINNING OF BIRTH PAINS

Matthew 24:9 “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.”

The Birth Pains

Luke 21:10&11 Then he said to them: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

Matthew 24:8 “All these are the beginning of birth pains.”

Then

Matthew 24:9 “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

The figures on how many Christians are killed for their faith annually vary widely. 4,000 per year is the lowest figure I have seen. 10,000 to 15,000 is a more common estimate. The Vatican claimed in a report to the United Nations in 2013 that the number was 100,000 for the past year. Although not everyone agrees, most researchers seem to have concluded that Christians are the world’s most persecuted people group. Muslims come in second, with much if not most of the persecution against them being by other Muslims.

Matthew 24:10&11 “At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people."

In America, it has been the rise of the “nones,” those professing no religious affiliation. The good news is that evangelical Christianity is not declining and that most of the “nones” come from churches that have abandoned orthodox Christianity. According to Pew Research, atheism and agnosticism are the two FASTEST DECLINING belief systems in the world.

In North America and Western Europe active antagonism against evangelical Christianity in particular and Christianity in general is increasing.

In a November 8, 1974 article entitled “Many Shall Come in My Name,” Christianity Today said, “In His Olivet Discourse Jesus warned, ‘Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many’ (Mark 13:6). Seldom has this warning been so explicitly fulfilled as in our day. On every side individuals and groups are making sweeping messianic claims. Some of these plainly set themselves up in opposition to the historic Christian faith, but others – and these are probably more dangerous to Christians – claim to be legitimate developments or fulfillments of Christ’s work and teaching.”

Much more recently, Watchmen Fellowship, Inc., a Christian apologetics group, put out an index of 1,200 cults and religions on the internet and said they had files on a total of about 10,000 groups.

Matthew 24:12 “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,” (Most can also be translated many.)

Quoted from the Barna Group: State of the Church 2020: “More than two and a half decades’ worth of religious tracking research shows that Americans are softening in their practice of Christianity.”

Fifty years ago a “regular church attender” meant someone who was in church unless they were sick or out of town. Now it means someone who comes three Sundays out of five.

Matthew 24:13 “but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”

“Stands firm” is the translation of a Greek word, which, according to Vine’s Expository Greek Dictionary, that means to “bear up courageously (under suffering).”

“The end” is the “end of the age” as in verse 3 and “the end” in verse 14.

The Greek word translated “saved” in verse 13 is translated “survive” in verse 22.

“If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive.” It often means rescued.

THE SIGN OF THE END OF THE AGE

Matthew 24:14 “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Mark 13:10 “And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.”

“Nations” is *“ethnos”* in Greek from which we get our English word “ethnic.” It basically means any people group, usually with their own language, culture, government and territory.

Luke 24:46&47 He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations *(ethnos)*, beginning at Jerusalem.”

Acts 1:6-8 NASB) And so when they had come together, they were asking him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority, but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even in the remotest part of the earth.”

“Times” is *“chronos”* the duration of time, a length of time and “epochs” is *“kairos,”* the defining characteristics of a time. Mark 1:15 “The time has come, he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.”

The word “both,” although not found in many translations, does translate a Greek word and seems to mean “simultaneously.”

Verse 8 is not a command, although it is something we are commanded to do. It is a statement of fact and seems to be Jesus’ answer to the question in verse 6, “Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”

Romans 11:25-27 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited; Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

Some Things to Think About

The “beginning of birth pains” will be followed by hatred and persecution of Christians by all nations *(ethnos)* and by many turning away from the faith.

There will be many false prophets who will deceive many.

“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most (many) will grow cold.”

Those who bear up courageously will be rescued.

The gospel will be preached to all the *“ethnos”* and then the end will come.

 As we approach the end, there will be incredible simultaneous proclamation of the gospel to all the *ethnos* while the love of many will grow cold. Biblical (evangelical) Christianity is the fastest growing religion in the world even as many grow cold in their love for God and many leave the faith.