

THE BIRTH PANGS OF CHRIST'S RETURN

The most terrifying and trying time that shall ever come upon the entire earth comes at the end of this age. It is also going to be the beginning stages of the new world order ushered in by none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Deception will abound. Jesus said of this time: *"For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many"* (Matthew 24:5). Violence will surround the inhabitants of earth with the foreboding dread of even more to come, *"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"* (Matthew 24:6). International strife shall escalate, *"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom..."*(Matthew 24:7a). The world will experience an increase of starvation, incurable diseases, and geographical cataclysms in all four hemispheres, *"...and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places"* (Matthew 24:7b). Then, just before Jesus spells out more gloom and doom, He injects this insightful verse: *"All these are the beginning of sorrows"* (Matthew 24:8). The word for "sorrows" is the Greek word, ὠδίν (odin) which means labor pains as in childbirth.

Through the pain of tribulation, the earth will be giving birth to the golden one thousand year reign of Christ on the earth: *"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."* (Revelation 20:6).

The Kingdom that shall be birthed on the earth is described in several places throughout the Bible. Allow the prophet Isaiah to give you a pleasant foretaste of the glory of God that shall be birthed in the earth. Heartbreak and misery shall be gone: *"And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying"* (Isaiah 65:19). Children will not die in infancy and the elderly will live out their days: *"There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days..."* (Isaiah 65:20:a). Homes will not be repossessed and your business will be blessed, *"And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them"* (Isaiah 65:21). All of nature will become tame: *"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den"* (Isaiah 11:6-8). Christ will rule and reign and His knowledge shall be dispersed throughout the whole earth: *"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea"* (Isaiah 11:9).

As we contemplate the future yet to come, the Lord is giving us a principle of the way He works which will give us more than coping skills, but rather an overcoming life that resonates with hope in the face of all conflict.

1. Sunrise is always promised in even the darkest night.

A very popular saying is, "It's always the darkest before the dawn." Actually, that is not true. It's darkest when the sun is 180 degrees away from where you are on earth. So, it's more likely to be darkest at midnight. We might want to re-arrange this old saying by declaring, "It's always darkest at midnight." Even so, in the darkest part of the night, God always gives His followers hope!

In the listing of tribulation sorrows, the Lord gives us hope by telling us of the birthing of a new world yet to come. In Matthew 24: 9-13, Jesus tells us there will be martyrs, betrayal, hatred, false prophets and an abandonment of love in the midst of multiplied acts of wickedness. Then in verse 14 we see this ray of hope: *"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."* All of the pain and punishments the Anti-Christ will launch upon the earth will not stop God's faithful evangelists from getting the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the uttermost parts of the earth. After this blessed promise, Christ returns to telling of the atrocities of the Anti-Christ from the abomination of desolation (a time when the Anti-Christ shows his true colors and is revealed as the Man of Sin as prophesied in II Thessalonians 2:3) to a slaughter so horrendous that if it were not for the redeemed in the earth, all human life would be extinguished. Then Jesus interrupts this chain of events with this glorious promise: *"For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be"* (Matthew 24:27).

We see this principle illustrated in Genesis 38. Judah and Tamar had committed a sin of the worst order. The fruit of their union was the birth of twins. The name of the firstborn was Pharez (Genesis 38:29), which means "broken" or "breach." The second-born twin was named Zarah, which means "sunrise" (Genesis 38:30). The boy named "Broken" who carried the family heritage seems now to be a commentary on the future for this chosen family. But his twin brother was born immediately after, reminding us that this horizon of doom was actually the breaking of a new dawn, a new day, a "Sunrise"! Zarah (sunrise) bears the scarlet thread reminding us the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin (I John 1:7). So we see the child named "Sunrise" made it possible for the broken lineage of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to be regained. Even in the darkest night there is the promise of sunrise!

2. History and prophecy give testimony that the birth of something great follows havoc.

We are approaching "Tetrad"; this is when we have four full lunar eclipses in a row, which is called the "Blood Moon." This has happened only three times in the last five hundred years and all three times this has happened at very special times. The first of the three was in 1493-1494 coinciding with the Jews being expelled by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand and the fall of Spain. This all tied in with the discovery of America by Columbus. The second came in 1949-1950 during Israel's War of Independence and declaration of Israel as a nation once again. The last one was 1967-1968 occurring in sequence with the Six Day War when Israel was surrounded by an attempted hostile take-over by her neighbors with an outcome of victory for Israel, which was nothing short of miraculous. By the way, NASA has verified all these dates.

In 2014 and 2015 we will have four blood moons back-to-back. The timing seems too coincidental to be a coincidence. The first is April 15, 2014, the exact day of the Jewish Passover. The second one will occur on October 8, 2014 on the very day of the Feast of the Tabernacles. The third will occur on April 8, 2015 again landing on the day Jews celebrate Passover. The final blood moon arrives on September 28, 2015, the exact date of the Feast of the Tabernacles.

The Bible prophesies, *"The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come"* (Joel 2:31). This prophecy is repeated in Acts 2:20. In between these four blood moons we shall have a total solar eclipse on March 20, 2015, i.e., *"The sun shall be turned into darkness..."* In the harmony of the Gospels, Luke 21 lines up with Matthew 24 and we see this prophecy, *"And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring"* (Luke 21:25). What could this mean? I'll let Jesus answer that for us: *"And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh"* (Luke 21:28).

3. As Christians, our response to sorrows should be rejoicing.

Jesus said, *"All these are the beginning of sorrows"* (Matthew 24:8). These sorrows are the discomforts of a mother about to give birth. I love this truth disclosed in the Bible and verified in the experience of mothers: *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy."*

A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world" (John 16:20,21). Jesus is telling His disciples of His approaching death and how his disciples will mourn, but they shall see Him in His resurrection glory and be so caught up with joy, that the sorrow is seen as an inclusive part of the rejoicing. In anticipation of the Lord's return we claim: *"Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away"*

(Isaiah 51:11). *“To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness...”*
(Isaiah 61:3). And in our personal experiences we may also claim these verses of rejoicing in the face of trials, as the Scriptures promise that we may *“...rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also...”* (Romans 5:2b-3a).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.