

The Beginning of Birth Pains, Part 3

Luke 21:9-11

March 24, 2024

Well, as we come back to our study of the Olivet Discourse, I'd ask you to turn into your Bibles to Luke, chapter 21, Luke 21. If you have been with us over the past couple of weeks, you know that we've been looking at this first section of Jesus' answer to the disciples' questions, questions that are put to him in Luke 21, verse 7. The disciples in verse 7 ask Jesus, "Teacher, when, therefore, will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"

As we have learned in previous weeks, the key clarifications of the disciples' questions have to do with the meaning of "these things." "These things," that's the expression that's used twice in verse 7. And we back up and look in the context for "these things" and what he's referring to. We see, verse 6, that Jesus spoke of only one thing, there, not plural.

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He just spoke of one thing, singular. So it's the prediction of the temple's total destruction. One thing singular, not multiple things, plural. And so we know, by backing up into the context, that there's more going on in the context than meets the eye.

Luke is the latest of the synoptic gospel writers. He wrote around AD 61. That is less than a decade's time before the destruction of Jerusalem. That'll become significant as we continue through the passage, but not yet. I'll come to that and explain it when we get there in verses 20-24. But it is less than a decade before the destruction of Jerusalem that Luke writes this gospel. He wrote to the patron and actually gave the name of the patron in the beginning of his gospel: Theophilus. That's the name to whom this gospel is addressed. But he knew that behind Theophilus would be a host of Gentile readers like us, and also Jewish readers.

But the Jewish readers, the Gentile readers, the readers of Luke's gospel would have access to Matthew's gospel, which was written earlier. In fact, it was written earliest. Matthew wrote about 10 years earlier, in the early 50s. Mark's gospel, that's

mid-50s, so just a few years after Matthew's. So when readers of Luke's gospel, having this gospel in their hand, and they see the "these things" that are referenced, they've already read Matthew and Mark very likely. They consult those other two synoptic gospels, and they find in those gospels a historical background behind the disciples' questions in Luke 21:7.

Not going to re-preach earlier sermons, but I'll just list the disciples' concerns just as a quick reminder of ground we've already covered. First, the disciples clearly know that the temple will be destroyed. Jesus just said that in verse 6. Illustrated in Luke 20, ground we've already covered, leaders' rejection of the Messiah, all the challenging of his authority, all that we've covered there, it's illustrated that the leaders have rejected their Messiah.

We go to the judgment and the indictment of Israel's leaders in Matthew 23, a very long chapter covering that indictment and the judgment of Jesus upon those leaders of Israel; and then the sentencing in Matthew 23:38 about the destruction of the Temple. Jesus pronounced the destruction very

clearly, as I said, in Luke 21:6. The disciples know the temple is going to be destroyed. That much is clear. We have no question about that. They didn't have a question about what Jesus was saying. It was clear, plain, and obvious, and backed up by Matthew 23. They knew the reasons why, and they didn't disagree with him. They just didn't understand how this fit. They had a certain eschatology, a certain understanding of the way things would go, and this was throwing them off a bit.

So we come to a second thing that we've clarified. They came to understand, based on what had already happened, based on what we understand historically in the other gospels, they understand, now, that Jesus is going away. That full realization wouldn't hit them until the next night, when Jesus takes them into the upper room and teaches them there. But he stated clearly in Matthew 23:39, after indicting the leaders of Israel, he said clearly in Matthew 23:39, "I say to you, from now on you shall not see me until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."" "You shall not see me until this happens.'"

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Very hard, now, as the disciples are thinking about that statement. When's that going to happen? It doesn't look good from the kind of leaders that we see here. It does not look good for them. "When is that going to happen, that we're going to see you again?" Jesus had spoken, as we mentioned I believe last week, he had spoken of his departure from Jerusalem at the Transfiguration, the departure that he was about to accomplish. He spoke on the Mount of Transfiguration with Elijah and Moses about that. As I said, he's going to have more to say to the disciples. On the very next night after this Olivet discourse, the very next night in the Upper Room discourse, John 13-16, he not only reiterates his departure, he introduces, then, to them the mystery of the Rapture, about the Rapture of the church, John 14:1-3.

But this is not the way that the disciples thought everything would end. This is not the end that they had envisioned. And so they're trying to piece this together. They're good Bible students. They have studied the Scriptures. They understand the Scriptures. And they're sitting there, thinking, as they're coming down from Jerusalem into the Kidron Valley, back up into the Mount of Olives and finding their place

to rest and calling it a night, maybe putting some food together. They're thinking about these texts, and they're thinking about what Jesus has said. And now they're considering things in a new light, and they've got questions. The disciples are trying to make some connections between the Messiah's departure, this destruction of the temple, his return, which would be the occasion of Israel's repentance. His return where he comes not in judgment as is clearly going to be the case with the destruction of the temple, but it's coming in salvation to rescue the nation of Israel from its enemies that have oppressed and dominated the land for centuries.

This results, thirdly, in the questions that they ask Jesus. We see them recorded, we see, obviously, Luke 21:7; we also see those paralleled over in Matthew 24:3 and Mark 13:4. I'm going to read Matthew's fuller record of the question. "As he, Jesus, was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'" Ah, now we understand what "these things" referred to twice in their questions in Luke 21:7, now we understand what these things are: The Second Coming and the end of the age are

included. And as we mentioned in the grammar, it's inescapable, these are conjoined events as per the language, the Granville Sharp construction that's there. That, by the way, is exactly how Jesus answers them, as if the end and the Second Coming are joined together as events that are side by side.

So the disciples, clearly in their question, they're looking beyond the destruction of the temple, and they're trying to figure out when God's restoration promises to Israel are going to be fulfilled. They trust them. They believe in him thoroughly and completely. They just don't understand how this fits together. It reminds you a little bit of when John, sitting in prison before he loses his head, he sends his disciples out to Jesus. "Are you the one who's coming, or should we expect somebody else? I'm trying to figure out the timing because I didn't think I'd end up here in prison." A very similar outworking of that thinking is going on with the disciples right now.

So that's the point of departure for Jesus' answer, which we read, starting in Luke 21:8. He starts out by saying this to

them: "See to it that you be not misled or that you be not deceived. For many will come in my name saying, "I am he and the time is at hand." Do not go after them.'" So we've covered that already in a couple weeks' time, and over the last couple weeks I should say. It's going to be at that time, after this massive deception is proliferated in the world on this massive scale, there's a host of false messiahs who infect the world with their lies and captivate the world of unbelievers, as Matthew 24:24 says, "by signs and wonders." This is the first of the birth pains that are coming, the first of the birth pains that introduce several others, which is our subject for today.

Jesus is concerned that his future disciples are not led away and carried away in this mass deception that's coming upon the earth during the Great Tribulation. Remember, though he's speaking directly to these disciples, his disciples looking at him face to face, they're the ones who've asked him these questions, but Jesus is looking to them as representatives of a future believing Israel, those who do say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." He's thinking about them, the disciples who live in the future, the disciples who are alive at that time. And that means the Twelve are representatives of

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future Israel, a believing Israel, a repentant Israel, those who witness these events, and they are going to receive Jesus at the Second Coming, and they will experience the end that he's talking about here.

So in addition to the danger of the deception spread by this host of false messiahs that's coming, Jesus predicts a number of other disturbing events that will be going on during this time as the birth pains grow in intensity, starting in verses 9-11. But let's just back up and start in verse 8, just see the whole answer as it starts. Jesus said, verse 8, "See to it that you are not deceived, for many will come in my name saying, "I am he," and "The time is at hand." Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified, for these things must take place first. But the end does not follow immediately.' Then he was continuing saying to them, 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues, and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.'" We have a break there in the text, as verse 12 says, "'but before all these things'"; we'll come to that next time.

As Jesus shifts his focus in verse 9, going from false messiahs who come first as the first of many birth pains, he turns his attention to what might be worrying signs of the end, false signs of the end, as it turns out, but his concern for his disciples shifts. The false Messiahs test the disciples in their discernment. The alarming events in the world, though, these are what test the disciples' faith, whether or not they trust Christ's word, whether or not their confidence is wholly and completely placed in God's sovereign protection of them as his people. In either way, whether it's the deception from false Messiahs or whether it's the disasters that are coming upon the world, for the disciples, these are tests, tests intended to help them to grow, to strengthen them during a very difficult time.

We can learn from that, can't we? We understand that every test that God brings into our life is also for our discernment, our growth and discernment, our growth and maturity, our growth and confidence in our faith, our strengthening of our faith. It's exactly what God does with his people through every

difficulty and hardship that we go through. That's what he's going to do with the saints at the end as well.

There's a governing command for these three verses that we're covering today. And the governing command for these three verses is this: "Do not be terrified." "Do not be terrified." It's a good translation. The usual word for "fear" in the New Testament is the verb *phobeo*, the noun *phobos*. We get the word "phobia" from this, but that's not the term here for "fear." The term here is a more intensified term. It's *ptoeo*, to terrify, to frighten, to alarm significantly. And in the New Testament, it's found only in the passive voice, so it's something that you're being subjected to. So "to be frightened, to be terrified, to be alarmed, terribly alarmed," it refers to a very deep sense of terror, a kind of craven fear that causes severe, lasting emotional distress. So it's not just the event itself, but it's what results from that event.

If any of you have had any traumatic event happen to you, something that you've gone through, victimized, and you still remember it now, and recall it, and it just sends shivers

through your spine: That's the sense of this word. Lexicographer Frederick Donker says the verb *ptoeo* refers to "what can cause profound anxiety over pending peril." So it's not just the fact of death; it's the terrifying kinds of death that are coming, the ways to die. I don't know about you, but I just want to pass in my sleep. I want it to be nice. I didn't used to feel that way as a young man. I was kind of dumb and thought what a great way to go through some kind of a horrific, on-the-battlefield kind of death, you know, bullet-riddled body, haven't shot up all my rounds, leading on the battlefield. Some kind of horrific thing like that. What a death in glory! And I think, "Man, what an idiot I was." I like easy.

As you think about this, there's nothing easy about this. Everything that's coming, here, is something that grips you with a sense of like foreboding and doom. Not just death; it's the kind of death that's coming. Jesus does not leave us guessing about what might tend to frighten, tend to terrify, and in each case the message is the same: "Don't be terrified." He's speaking to his people: "Do not be terrified."

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So as we move through the verses, here, we're going to use Jesus' command as kind of the theme for each of our points. Don't be terrified by, number one, conflicts; number two, by catastrophes; and number three, by calamities. Conflicts, catastrophes, calamities.

First, number one, don't be terrified by conflicts. Don't be terrified by conflicts. What conflicts? Again, verse 9: "When you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified, for these things must take place first. But the end does not follow immediately." What is war? War is armed conflict. It's the word *polemos*, from which we get our word "polemic." Polemic is a strongly critical attack. It's the attack element that is the theme of this word. It's an attack by force of arms. It makes a war a war. It is force of arms. Two or more parties are engaging with one another in armed conflict. It could be between nations and states, or it could be between groups within a nation, warring factions, warring tribes, clans. Whatever it is, it's the force of arms aspect of that.

In the parallel accounts in Matthew 24:6 and Mark 13:7, Jesus says it this way: “When you hear of wars,” and not just disturbances, but “wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened.” In this case, the word *threo*, again, only in the passive voice in the New Testament, there in Matthew 24:6, Mark 13:7, the verb is *threo*, to be inwardly troubled or alarmed or disturbed. So Matthew and Mark, they add “rumors of wars.” So talking not just about the reality of armed conflict, but also the potentiality of armed conflict, both of which, if you are maybe on that battle line, if it's coming to you, both of those will cause anxiety. And it's when you hear of those things and you know that war is coming, that the Huns are at the gate, so to speak, or the Turks are at the gate, whatever the case, both cause anxiety and fear.

In those gospels, Jesus says, “Don't be troubled.” Here in Luke's gospel, the command is “Don't be terrified.” And so you might ask, well, which is it? Which did Jesus actually say? Which word did he use? Well, he gave both commands. He said both things. We need to understand that this is what we do with scripture and especially in the synoptic accounts, all three of these accounts. We know that Jesus said all that's written

there. He said more as well, but definitely all that's there. We harmonize these things because each writer took from what Jesus actually said by the direction of the Holy Spirit, drawing on all of his teaching. And they wrote, each writer writing his account with a specific purpose in his writing. Matthew's purpose, Mark's purpose, Luke's purpose, all of them have a distinct purpose. As we harmonize the three synoptic accounts, we get the fullest picture. We understand Jesus said both things. “Don't be troubled,” Matthew and Mark, and then “Don't be terrified,” Luke.

So wars, rumors of wars, armed conflict, actual armed conflict between groups, clans, tribes, states, nations, kingdoms, and also potential of armed conflict between all of those. In Luke 21:9, Jesus also warns them about, you can see in the NAS and the LSB, they translate the term, there, “disturbances,” “disturbances.” The word is *akatastasia*. It's an intensified word that refers to social unrest, civic instability, civil disorder. The term encompasses a mob violence, a public uprising, disturbance, people rioting in the streets. We've seen something akin to this. Think just recently, during 2020, strange things were going on during that weird

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year. Think George Floyd riots and how Minneapolis was just turned into a battleground by its own citizens, BLM riots. Think Proud Boys versus Antifa and all the stuff that was going on there. Think of war protests, for some of you who are a little bit older who can remember the Vietnam War protests and how violent those things could become. Certain parts of the city you did not go to. This is that word: uprisings, often violent uprisings, civil unrest.

Now bear in mind again, we're not even close to the level of "wars and rumors of wars" that Jesus is predicting for the end of the age, the time that is just prior to the Second Coming. What Jesus describes here in scripture is on a whole different level than anything we have seen. Why do I say that? Because, again, note the forceful language of Jesus' command: "Do not be terrified." Don't be terrified. As I said, the verb *ptoeo* refers to a deep sense of terror that can tempt believers to that kind of terror, a craven fear resulting in severe and enduring emotional distress. The command, there, is to believers.

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Remember back when, a couple years ago, when Russia invaded Ukraine and hearing the reports of churches there in Ukraine? They had no fear whatsoever. In fact, they were gathering resources from the West to do mission work to the refugees. There was no sense of craven fear, terror, or emotion. They were not tempted that way at all. It's different, here. This command, "Don't be terrified," is to believers. It's to the ones who are saved, who are reconciled to God, who are confident in God's sovereign will and God's purpose, those who trust in the protection of an omnipotent God. When they hear about wars, actual wars and potential wars, when they hear about this social unrest and see it and the rioting and the violence in the streets, civil disorder, turmoil, this is going to be a time, these disturbances will be on such a level that even believers are going to have to exercise discernment and discipline over their wills, discipline over their emotions, to obey this command of Christ. This is the level.

I don't know where you were or when you heard about the terrorist attacks on September 11 of 2001. I recently was in a conversation with someone who wasn't born then, and I felt old immediately. But it's true that not everybody in the country

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experienced the events of 9/11 like I did as I was on my morning commute into seminary, you know, 2,500 miles away from 9/11. What I experienced on that day as I heard about this was a level of indignation that made me want to drop out of seminary and rejoin my former military unit and go take some hurt and pain and discontent to the enemy for what they had done in attacking our country. I know that many people felt the same way, and the recruiters' offices were packed with young men, young women who wanted to go and support their country during that time.

I know that not everybody experienced that day like I did. The citizens in New York City, citizens New Jersey, Washington, DC, I'm sure their emotions ran the gamut. But even in and among New Yorkers, it didn't take long for any sense of terror or fear to turn to rage and anger. And their anger turned to resolve and their resolve turned to war. What happened on that day against our nation was an act of war, a terrorist attack, a strike, and it was an attack, we have to realize, in a long line of acts of war. Some people don't realize that. They think that came out of the blue. It did not. There were signals of that for decades beforehand.

I realize that was an attack that shocked and awakened our nation, but from a longer historical perspective, it was really nothing new. The wars that kicked off after September 11, they, too, just additional chapters added to many volumes in the history of warfare that can fill entire libraries. In fact, you could say the history of the world, going all the way back to the very beginning, is the history of warfare. It's of man killing man, clan killing clan, tribe against tribe, nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom. That's been going on for a long time. I love the inimitable way that John MacArthur describes the point, quoting from him on this. He says, "If you ever study the history of the world, you study the history of war, the history of who conquers whom, who subjugates whom, who defeats whom, who wins, who loses, who triumphs, who advances, who retreats. The whole of human history is the history of war, civil war, border, war, tribal war, family war, revolutions, rebellions, military actions, terrorism, genocide, world wars. The only time there's any peace is when everybody pauses to reload."

It's very true. In fact, I looked it up, and currently in the world today, there are more than 110 armed conflicts

underway, as in right now. The Geneva Academy monitors armed conflicts around the world at all times and says this: "Some of these conflicts make the headlines, others do not. Some of them started recently, while others have lasted for more than 50 years." By their data, more than 45 armed conflicts are going on right now in the Middle East and North Africa. More than 35 conflicts across the continent of Africa. Another 21 conflicts in Asia, 7 in Europe, 6 in Latin America. That's current data going back even through the past year. But there have been armed conflicts going on throughout the history of the world, before and after the first century in every single part of the world. Most of them have gone unreported over the centuries and over the millennia.

Some say, as they come to passages like this, some say these conflicts are growing worse and worse. But frankly, and please don't misunderstand me here, don't take me to be callous or unfeeling at all, but I am not seeing that, that things are getting worse and worse right now. I'm actually seeing this as a continuity from the very beginning all the way through this current point. I mean, in my mind, the Taliban, Al Qaeda, ISIS, which took credit for the Moscow massacre that just happened the

last couple days and killing 130-plus people and hurting a whole lot more, shooting up a theater. ISIS, they're not any worse than the Assyrians who used to impale their victims on poles or made a grotesque pile of human heads and severed heads, a pile, a pyramid of heads at the entrance of cities. Is ISIS, Al Qaeda, worse than that? Or are they the same?

What about the Romans who used to crucify thousands of victims *en masse*? Or the Greeks who did it before them, and going back a long way, even as we think about more recent monsters like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, modern maniacal dictators who are responsible for killing 100 million people or more? We need to stop and realize, when we look back across the centuries and the millennia, they are nothing new. Hitler, Stalin, Mao: They're actually old-school rulers. They've got ancient mentalities about brutality and barbarity and violence. They're not really squeamish about it at all. And that actually fits in with the wide swath of human history of how people regarded human life. Under any paganism, under any false religion, human life is disregarded. It is a culture of death wherever Christianity does not prevail. So these old-school rulers, Hitler, Stalin, Mao, what's different about them? Modern

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weaponry? I'm not minimizing their cruelty, their criminality, their brutality. I'm not minimizing that all by any means. But I just want you to know they're nothing new.

What Jesus predicts here, though, is nothing that the world has ever seen. He's talking about a time of great tribulation, a world that's cast into chaos after the rapture of the church. When all these people disappear to the eyes of the unbelieving in the world, chaos is going to ensue. It's a world deceived, a world under a demonic spell, captivated by all the promises of false messiahs. And Jesus is predicting, here, a world that is ruled by fear, held in the grip of terror. All the people of the land living on a hair trigger, ready to take up arms just in self-protective conflict, ready to follow anybody who says, "I've got your problem solved, follow me."

You can see this described in the figurative language of Revelation. I'll ask you to turn to Revelation chapter 6 because that does parallel this in what Jesus revealed in Revelation to John. This is describing the same time, the beginning of the tribulation. You need to understand that the events of the

tribulation run from Revelation 6 all the way to Revelation 19, culminating in the Second Coming. When Jesus comes, it puts it all to rest. But Revelation chapter 6:1-4, here, we're just starting, Jesus says, this is the parallel with the beginning of the birth pains. If you've ever heard of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, this is where that expression comes from. Four horses, four horsemen, and it's drawn, by the way, from the same imagery of Zechariah 1:7-11, same imagery there.

And the Four Horsemen, here, do not picture, I believe, don't picture four individuals, but rather these are four, they're pictured that way in figurative language as four individuals, but they're actually four conquering forces that introduce the Tribulation: first, of coming to promise hope, but ultimately, very quickly bringing death. Various ways to view the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Obviously, this is contested ground. Now is not the time I'm going to be able to clarify everything for you here, answer all your questions. After all, we're working through Luke's gospel, not John's Revelation. If you want to study Revelation, stick around for another decade or two. We'll get there. Just got to be a little

patient with me, that's all. But I'm going to tell you what I think about some of this.

For now, look at Revelation 6:1-2: "Then I looked when the Lamb opened." "The Lamb," by the way, in the previous chapter we find out he is the only one worthy to open the scroll, to break its seals; and here he's breaking the seals of the scroll before he unscrolls it and reads it. He's breaking the seals, and he breaks seal number one. "I looked when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying, as with a voice of thunder, 'Come.' And then I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sits on it had a bow, and a crown was given to him and he went out overcoming and to overcome."

Some people say that's the Antichrist. I don't think so. I don't think the rider of the white horse is the Antichrist. I also don't hold the opposite view, that some say that this is Jesus. I don't see this as Jesus at all. Jesus does show up on a white horse at the end of the Great Tribulation, Revelation 19:11. That's the Second Coming. He's depicted, then, in a far

different way than the figure of Revelation 6:2; and I will leave it to you to draw the number of contrasts that you can see there between Revelation 19 and Revelation 6:2.

But for several reasons I won't go into now, I believe the rider on the white horse figuratively represents the false messiahs that Jesus warned about in our text in Luke 21:8. These are the false messiahs. They come impersonating the true Messiah, riding on a white horse like Jesus will eventually ride on. They come in his name. They claim to be the Messiah, proclaiming, "The time has come. This is the end." So this is parallel to Matthew 24:5, Mark 13:6, Luke 21:8. And some notice, as they observe this rider on the white horse, that the horseman, I think they're right about this, they see that the horseman holds a bow, but notice that there's no mention of arrows. This points to the bloodless nature of their victories. Conquering, for the false messiahs, comes by their charisma, by their deception, manipulation, coercion of people.

Now false messiahs may not shed blood, but others aren't so squeamish. Jesus said, "There will be wars and rumors of

wars,'" but look at the next verse. "When he opened the second seal," verse 3, "I heard the second living creature saying, 'Come.' And another, a red horse went out and to him who sits on it, it was given to him to take peace from the earth and that men would slay one another, and a great sword was given to him." That portrays in figurative language exactly what Jesus predicted in the Olivet Discourse.

You can return there now. We'll come back to Revelation 6, so keep a finger there, but go back to Luke 21:9. It stands to reason, since the same one who delivered the Olivet Discourse also gave John the revelation to record in the Book of Revelation, that these things are going to conjoin and going to interpret one another. But here in Luke 21, Jesus is assuring his disciples, present disciples and future disciples, "Don't fear the massive uptick that you're going to see at that time in warfare. Verse 9: "'When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, wars and disturbances, do not be terrified, for these things must take place first, but the end doesn't follow immediately.'"

Several points of interest before we move on. First, when Jesus says, ““These things must take place first.”” That sentence in verse 9 begins with a coordinating conjunction, the word “and” in Greek, but it's translated “and” as a coordinating conjunction. So it means that these things, wars and disturbances, connect back to the false messiahs from the previous verse. So all these things are the beginning of birth pains, false messiahs and wars and disturbances.

Second point to make, this is pretty subtle in the English, but in the Greek text it's absolutely clear the word translated “must,” it's the verb *dei*, by which Jesus indicates a divine necessity is at work, here. This is God's purpose, God's will unfolding. Back to the majority of uses of the word *dei*. The verb points to God's sovereign work. It shows him, his invisible sovereignty behind the scenes that has ordained all the events taking place, bringing his perfect will to pass. It is the exact same expression and language in Matthew 24:6, Mark 13:7, Luke 21:9. All three accounts are consistent, perfectly parallel at this particular point.

Third thing to say, so we need to understand, false messiahs, wars, or wars: These things must take place first. "It is necessary" is another way to translate that. Necessary by what standard? By God's will. That's why it's necessary. This must happen. So third thing we see: these false messiahs, the wars, social unrest, rumors, and more wars, all these are necessary preludes to the end, which Jesus clearly says in verse 9, "'does not follow immediately.'" There is a time gap here. The other two writers record something similar, as Jesus saying it this way, not saying the end doesn't follow immediately. Jesus said that as well, but he also said, "'But the end is not yet.'" That's what they translate. That's what they give. Obviously, he said both things as we've already made that point.

Matthew and Mark, their comment that "the end is not yet," that is to prevent an incorrect judgment on behalf of the disciples, on behalf of us, any of us who might think, "Oh, it's getting real bad, Russians invaded Ukraine, there's been attacks from Hamas on Israel. Therefore, this is the sign of the end." We're all supposed to take a step back, take a deep breath and say, "The end is not yet." These things are not happening. Those are false signs. This is to prevent an incorrect judgment. And

why would these disciples in particular need this warning? Because a very serious judgment is coming upon the city of Jerusalem in just a couple decades. As they're reading it here, in AD 61 or 62 when Luke wrote, it's less than a decade away. They need to take a deep breath and realize that even what happens in Jerusalem in AD 70, the end is not yet. That is not a sign that the end is coming, that the Second Coming is happening then.

It's followed by a subordinate conjunction, "for." "For nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom." That "for" is an explanation or a further elaboration of what he just said, same wording both accounts in Matthew and Mark. Luke doesn't just say, "The end is not yet, for nation will rise against nation." In Luke, he pauses the flow entirely, and he inserts his own voice as the narrator, and he breaks the flow of Jesus' prophecy here with what may seem at first glance to be an unnecessary interruption.

But on closer inspection, as we reflect on this, we see that Luke is acting as a very good narrator, here, to emphasize

Jesus' purpose, to emphasize Jesus' point; namely to see that verse 10, the international conflicts of nations and kingdoms, those are an extension of the "wars and the disturbances" of verse 9. In fact, everything that follows, earthquakes, famines, plagues, terrors, signs, in each case we need to insert "the end is not yet," "the end is not yet," "the end doesn't follow immediately." That's how we need to read this. These are not the signs you were looking for. Remember "These are not the droids you're looking for"? "These are not the signs you were looking for," is what Jesus is saying.

"The sign," by the way, just to give you a preview of coming attractions, "the sign," verse 27, is the Son of Man, "like lightning that flashes from the east and is seen to the west," everybody's going to see it. He, himself, coming is the sign. Basically, what we need to realize here is that in the Great Tribulation time, all things are going to get really bad, worse than we've ever seen them. It's going to seem like all hell is breaking loose, like the demonic has been unleashed on the earth, and certainly, the end is upon us, and the end, then, that Christ is on his way down. But as bad as these wars, rumors of wars, disturbances are going to get, as bad as it is for the

population who experience this, none of these events are the end themselves. They are a prelude to the end, which is coming in a very short time.

So verse 10, notice that Jesus continues there, saying, “Nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom.” Again, he's not merely reiterating the wars and disturbances of the previous verse; he's just simply expanding and broadening the scope. He's elaborating, saying that the scope of this conflict is not just going to be local or regional; it's going to be on an international scale. It's not going to stay contained within borders of nations and kingdoms though it will be within the borders, but also border to border, nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom. So these international conflicts are going to kick off: warfare on a global scale, engulfing the entire world in armed conflicts in a massive, unparalleled level of bloodshed. That's what's coming in the Great Tribulation. Nations and kingdoms all going to war with one another. This is politics and diplomacy breaking down completely. This is a time when the fiery red horse and its rider “take peace from the earth.” It's not just a local

expression, "take peace from the land." It's the entire earth, there. It takes peace, that men should slay one another.

But again, Jesus tells his people, as bad as things will be at that time, "the end is not yet." It doesn't follow immediately; there's a gap, and his message remains the same. Beloved, do not be terrified. Do not be gripped with the terror. Don't be caught up in the same hysteria that is going to unfold around you.

The prophecy, as I said, continues in verse 10, but let's turn this into a second point because of the shift in what can cause the fear and anxiety. We go from human conflict, and Jesus then reveals the acceleration of natural catastrophe, natural consequences of widespread warfare. So point number two, don't be terrified by catastrophes. Do not be terrified by catastrophes. Jesus says, middle of verse 10, "'and there will be great earthquakes and in various places plagues and famines.'" Guess what? These are not signs of the end, that the Second Coming is happening. They're not signs of that, either. To the social, political chaos that he has just prophesied are

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going to be added natural disasters hitting the earth, and the first mentioned are massive earthquakes.

Now I discovered there are lots of earthquake data related websites, lots of study on earthquakes in the modern age and going back, and actually it's amazing how they can go back into history and kind of piece together, it's like detectives putting together Richter scale levels and all that kind of stuff. There's so much that it would be unprofitable for our purposes to spend too much time on this, and I'll just refer you, actually this time to Wikipedia. It's got a good collation of data. You can go to the USGS website, but some of the font there is like, so small that you're going to need thick, Coke bottle glasses to be able to read it. So peruse at your leisure.

But let me just stick with a few illustrations from the past 50 years about earthquakes. July 28, 1976. I was just a little six-year-old guy then, but it was an earthquake in Hebei, China, killed an estimated 250,000 people in that earthquake, official numbers. But perhaps as many as 700,000 people died in that earthquake, making it the deadliest earthquake of the 20th

century, third deadliest in recorded history. December 26 of 2004. Maybe some of you remember this earthquake off the coast of Sumatra, Indonesia, measured 9.1 or between 9.1, 9.3 on the Richter scale, created a tsunami that killed about 230,000 people, but injured hundreds of thousands and displaced 1.2 million people in 14 countries of South Asia and East Africa. East Africa! It's incredible, incredible tsunami. January 12 of 2020. I saw the evidence of this. An earthquake in Haiti measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale, but it killed between 100,000 and 300,000 people, injured another 300,000 people. Nearly 100,000 homes were destroyed, another 200,000 damaged; 1.3 million people displaced in that country. Obviously, that country is going through a terrible, terrible crisis right now. Following year, March 11, 2011, an earthquake in Sendai, Japan killed nearly 20,000 people, another 2,500 missing, 6,000 injured, 130,000 people displaced, hundreds of thousands of buildings, thousands of roads damaged and destroyed, bridges, railways destroyed or damaged.

But the highest death toll of any earthquake on record, according to the USGS website, January 23 of 1556. So we're talking the 16th century, we're talking Reformation days. This

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took place in Shaanxi, China, capital of Xi'an, where the terracotta warriors are buried with their emperor. Maybe you've seen the terracotta warriors. You can find them online. Very, very interesting backstory there. That's the eastern starting point of the ancient trade route known as the Silk Road. But there was an estimated magnitude of 8-plus on the Richter scale, an earthquake that was felt more than 500 miles away. That's an inland part of China, so it had to ripple through all the earth. Killed more than 830,000 people, 50% of the province's population dead at that time.

There's an ancient Chinese source that described the earthquake this way. It says this: "In the winter of 1556, an earthquake catastrophe occurred. Various misfortunes took place." Listen to the description. "Mountains and rivers changed places." We read about that in scripture, and we always think, "Is that just figurative language for for 'really scary'?". According to this, "Mountains and rivers changed place; roads were destroyed. In some places the ground suddenly rose up and formed new hills or sank abruptly and became new valleys. In other areas, steam burst out in an instant, or the ground broke and new gullies appeared. Huts, official houses, temples, city

walls collapsed all of a sudden." End quote. Those who heard in the surrounding region and other countries believed that that earthquake in particular was a divine punishment for the people's sins. They connected the dots to God. There was a sign, they said, of that great calamity that appeared in the sky, a great comet of 1556, which they believed was the sign of the birth of the Antichrist. Isn't that interesting? 1556. China.

As bad as that earthquake was, with the high, high death toll, as bad as other earthquakes have been, none of these are signs of the end either. They're not signs that the Second Coming is happening, obviously. It's easy to understand, though. I mean, if you've ever lived, I've been through some little minor, minor things, when we lived in California, but nothing bad. Every time that something would happen, people in California would say, "Well, you should have been here in '94 when the Northridge earthquake took place. Felt like the end was coming." That's what they said. It's easy to understand how people would think that if you've ever lived through such a devastating catastrophe, why people would be tempted to see the things that are happening as the signs of the end. And Jesus says here it is not. Something really bad is coming. Think about

the massive death toll of a great earthquake. Dead bodies everywhere. The aftermath, too, as you go walking through the rubble, infrastructure is destroyed. You can't get anywhere because roads are destroyed. Everybody's cut off from everybody else. The production and distribution of energy resources cut off. Displaced population. No running water, no good plumbing, no proper hygiene.

And so, as we see in the text, along with natural catastrophes of earthquakes, people are going to suffer natural consequences of warfare and things like this, as well as these natural disasters, desperate times, widespread disease, unsanitary conditions leading to plagues. The word we've come to prefer in our day, evidently, is "pandemic." Truly, a pandemic is coming, here. COVID, with whatever the death toll was, was nothing. Famines are going to come at that time due to God-ordained judgments, judgments like a lack of rain, blight on the crops, infestation of pests and insects. A food shortage is going to be exacerbated by the landscapes ravaged by warfare, fields of crops destroyed, not to mention the homes and cities flattened by the earthquakes, all that results in chaos.

Now, with all that cheery information in mind, go back to Revelation chapter 6. We see the same kind of language that Jesus uses there in his revelation to John as he shows John what's going to happen in the end. And we see these phenomenon, same phenomenon here listed here, but in reverse order. We start with the famines, result of global warfare, ravages landscapes, disrupts farming and ranching. Warfare is bad on growth, slows or stops food production, distribution, especially as so much of the nation's food needs to go to feed the armies. Look at Revelation 6:5-6: "When he opened the third seal I heard the living creature saying, 'Come,' and then I looked and behold, a black horse, and he who sits on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard something like a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, 'One choinix of wheat for one denarius, three choinix of barley for one denarius, and do not harm the oil and the wine.'"

The best explanation for this third-seal judgment is massive inflation is going to hit the grain prices, the grain market. It's going to hit the wheat and the barley, staple diet of most common people, most people, work-a-day people, but the luxury items already out of reach for most, especially in hard

times. Those luxury items like the oil and the wine will not be touched. This famine is going to be unique in the history of famines, not only due to the severity, and it's famines in various places by the way, so it's happening around the earth. But it's going to also be unique in the disparity, the results between rich and poor, dividing people further from one another. This is going to exacerbate class struggle, lead to further class warfare.

And when the body count piles up due to this unprecedented level of famine, then come diseases and plagues; as I said, known more commonly today as epidemics and pandemics. Look at verses 7 and 8: "He opened the fourth seal, and I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, 'Come,' and then I looked and behold, a pale horse, and he who sits on it had the name Death, and Hades was following him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth to kill with the sword, and with famine, and with pestilence, and by the wild beasts of the earth."

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We'll stop there for a minute. The same judgment, language, and that prophecy comes from Ezekiel. We can see the same language in Ezekiel as God told Jerusalem's leaders he's not going to spare Judah and Jerusalem from judgment. Same four methods of judgment, Ezekiel 14:21, "my 4 severe judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts and plague to cut off man and beast from it." That actually happened in history in the three Babylonian invasions that ensued after that prophecy: 605 BC to 597 BC, 586 BC destroyed Jerusalem, Judah by the sword, by famine, by wild beast, by plague.

Those same judgments, those methods of judgment are going to be deployed again, but in the Tribulation period. It's not going to just be to the city of Jerusalem, not just going to be to the land of Judah as it was in 605, 597, 586 BC. This time it's going to kill a quarter of the population of the earth. These are staggering numbers. What are we at? About 8 billion people in the world today? Two billion gone because of this. Folks, I just need to reiterate the point here. The intensity of this, the severity of this, these events during the Tribulation, one-fourth of the world's population dying in a span of just a few years? Nothing like this has ever happened in the world.

Obviously, nothing like this happened during the brief period of history between Jesus' ascension in AD 33 up to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. So any preterist view of this is wrong. Nothing like this has happened at any point since then in world history, either. This is not just business as usual. What's going to happen then is something very dramatic, very different, to where people around are going to be living in terror. Believers commanded, "Don't be terrified. Don't be terrified."

So we're still waiting for these birth pains to begin. They're still future to us, but there's more. The earth is going to convulse with great earthquakes during the Tribulation period. In John's revelation, a massive one is coming, an unprecedented quake of unimaginable magnitude. We read about it in Revelation 6:12 and following, but before we read, let's transition to one final point in your outline if you're taking notes. Number three, don't be terrified by calamities. Don't be terrified by calamities. The beginning of birth pains, false messiahs, human conflict, warfare, bloodshed, followed by famines and plagues to include great earthquakes, they lead to

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Luke 21:11, "terrors and great signs from heaven," and the message to the believers who will be living at that time, it is still this: "Do not be terrified. You believers, don't be terrified." You're going to have to be intentional to heed that. You have to be disciplined to obey this because the chaos and the suffering is vast, and it's unprecedented, and it is frightening, and the unbelieving are going to be gripped by terror. But the believing, you take refuge in your God. You take refuge in your God.

We're going to skip over the fifth seal in Revelation 6, the cry for vengeance from the martyrs and the Tribulation. We're going to look at the sixth seal that starts in verse 12. One great earthquake listed here, followed by terrors, great signs from heaven, which makes it parallel to Luke 21:11. But look at verse 12 and following in Revelation chapter 6: "Then I looked when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood. The stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it's rolled up. And every mountain and island were moved out of

their places. And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong, and every slave and freeman hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'"

Remarkable, isn't it, that the unbelievers of the world, even kings, great men, commanders, generals, rich, powerful, along with the poor and the weak, all of a sudden class divides are gone. All of a sudden, wealth distinctions gone. They are all equally terrified, slave and free. And everyone at that time will know for sure this is none other than the wrath of God and the wrath of the Lamb. Isn't that fascinating? They've got theology. No heart of repentance. Sounds like some of the testimonies we heard in baptism this morning. All right. A lot of theology. No heart of regeneration, no repentance, no faith in God, no love for Christ. They cannot deny or explain away anything that's happening. This is obviously divine judgment on a scale they've never seen ever. But even then, still no love of the truth, still no repentance for their sin.

Now with that in mind, let's turn back to Luke 21, verse 11. Try to finish this last portion here. Jesus said, "'Nation will rise against nation,'" verse 10, "'kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes in various places, plagues, famines,'" and then, as if to separate them from the other birth pains, Jesus says, "'There will be terrors and great signs from heaven.'" The word for "terrors," there: *phobetron*, *phobetron*. Built from the typical word for fear, *phobos*. But this is the only time the word *phobetron* is used in the New Testament. It's very rare. It means "horror," it means "terror." In this context it's connected with signs from heaven. So it means terrible sight, horrific sight. The lexicographer Arndt translates this, "There will be dreadful portents and signs."

Some assume "terrible sights and signs" from heaven are nothing more than, as one commentator explains this, he says, "By the signs from heaven we are to understand meteors, auroras, eclipses, et cetera, phenomenon to which the vulgar readily attach a prophetic significance." End quote. So I guess we're a world full of people looking at auroras. Aurora borealis, that's what he's saying is described here. That's not the word. That is

not the impression Jesus is giving. How would just looking at meteors, aurora borealis, eclipses of the sun, solar eclipses, lunar eclipses, how would that explain these beginning of birth pains to which vulgar pagans attach prophetic significance as tempting true believers to be carried along with the terror of pagans? How would it explain that?

I mean, it is one thing, isn't it, for the superstitious and the pagan to attach prophetic significance to more common heavenly phenomena like meteors, auroras, and eclipses. It's quite another thing, as we read in verse 25, to see the unprecedented effect of these signs on people. The word "signs" in verse 11 connects with the same word in verse 25. In fact, if you took out verses 12-19, you could read it in a flow, continues Jesus' thought. Verse 25 continues Jesus thought from verse 11. He says, "'There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.'" It's not talking about boyfriend, girlfriend out on date night looking at the

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stars and saying, "Oh look, a shooting star!" This is something completely different.

So why, in the face of all these truly terrifying and frightening events and signs, how can Jesus say, "'Don't be terrified' "? How can you say that? Why does this command of our assurance make any sense? Because Jesus says in verses 27-28, "'All these birth pains will eventuate in the joy of birth.'" In this case, the birth is a metaphor for the return of the Son of Man. This is what all believers, whether those who are returning with Christ from heaven, like the church who's been raptured and does not go through any of this, or those who will receive Christ when he returns to the earth, Jew and Gentile who've gotten saved during the Tribulation time, and they receive Christ as he returns back to earth.

Listen, wherever you are on the timetable, this is the main event for every believer. This is what we long for. This is what we are waiting for, longing for, like the kind of anticipation that new parents have who are awaiting the birth of their first-born child. Once the birth pains start, the birth is not yet,

but that birth is coming soon. Joy is at the other end of that pain.

So we come to the end of verse 11, and Jesus takes a pause here after verse 11 to speak to his disciples in their current situation. Instead of continuing on with the great signs, talking about the birth pains of the end leading to the great signs from heaven, the dismay that terrifies the nations, the things which are coming upon the entire world, Jesus pauses to speak a word of comfort to his disciples, disciples that are representing here all believers, but these disciples in particular. He speaks to them in verses 12-19 because they're soon going to endure a great testing. Then he speaks to them about the judgment coming up on the whole of the Jewish nation in verses 20-24, and he warns them, there, to get out. He's got an exit plan for them. He's got an evacuation strategy for his people, and we're going to see that the community of Christians in Jerusalem does exactly that. They do escape from Jerusalem, as history records.

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But first, verse 12, before all these things, Jesus tells his disciples, “‘You’ll be arrested, you’ll be persecuted, you’ll be delivered over to synagogues, you’ll be thrown in prison, you’ll be brought before authorities.’” “But don’t worry about it. It’s all part of the plan. It’s all part of the plan for me getting the gospel out, for me putting you on a pedestal, on display, giving you a mouthpiece and allowing you to speak to many, many people about my gospel.” More about that next time. Powerful words of encouragement coming to the disciples. And we can take great comfort from them as well. But for now, that’s what we have time for. Let’s close in prayer.

Our Father, we are so grateful that you sent the Lord Jesus Christ to save us from our sins, so that we can be included in the commands that he gives not to be deceived, not to go after false messiahs, not to go after false teachers, to false prophets, deception, to be wary, but also the command to not be alarmed, to not be terrified, to not let anything trouble our hearts. As Jesus said to his disciples, “‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. For I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, you may be also.’”

Father, we pray for the rapture of the church, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray for your justice to be on display, for you to be fully glorified. We we want to see every knee bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father. We would haste the day of the these events coming, but we realize what we prefer, what we long for, what we want in our time frame is not yours. And we trust you. We know that the fact that you did not send the Lord Jesus Christ a hundred years ago means that we have been saved. We, too, could be born into this world and see the glory of your Messiah. We could see the way that you dealt with our sins in the cross. We could see the perfections of Jesus Christ and realize what your commands of obedience really mean, how far they go, how deep they go, and how Jesus kept the law perfectly on our behalf. We see everything fulfilled in Him.

We trust you. We know that your timing in sending him the first time is perfect, and your timing in sending him the second time is also perfect. We trust you. We ask that you would help us never to be afraid, not to be misled or deceived, but instead to stand up and speak boldly the truth of your gospel to the

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people who so desperately need to hear it. We've heard the testimonies of five of them this morning in the waters of baptism, and every one of those testimonies reminded us of our own salvation.

We're so grateful that you've forgiven us of our sin. We ask that you would save many more through the witness of this church and other faithful gospel-preaching churches, not only in our region but across this nation and across the world. Please use the turbulent times that we're living in, as much convulsion goes on politically and everything else. We pray that you would help us to be faithful, to speak boldly and truthfully and lovingly to a world who so desperately needs your salvation. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.