

Famine (Part 2): Behold, A Black Horse

Contemporary Famine

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Most of the widespread hunger in this world of plenty results from political, social and economic disruptions that cause extensive suffering. This is not something that you do not know; everyone recognizes this. Greed, selfishness, stealing, warring, hatred, perverse religions and corrupt governments contribute to the hunger plight of this world. If it were not for the sins of humanity, and Satan's desire to destroy mankind, such natural causes of famine as droughts and floods might be mostly compensated for with right farming methods, technology and international aid. We see that here in the United States, sometimes in our disasters, that we are able, with aid, to rush the necessary needs of human existence to areas such as we saw in the hurricane areas.

But, there are penalties to be paid for sin. And, since we live in a sinful world, death is all around us because "the wages of sin is death". The world is reaping what it is sowing, and so it is reaping the penalties of its own sins. In our own individual lives, we have to make sure that we are overcoming sin so we can, in one sense, laugh at famine, and I will explain that a little more later.

This suffering and death has happened for millennia, and this world has not even received God's judgment. The Day of the Lord has not yet come. Jesus Christ has not yet returned, with His spiritual army, as the Feast of Trumpets depicts. And yet, already there has been so much paying of the penalty for sin.

Famine has increased. Is this an indication that Christ is returning very soon?

In my first sermon on famine, we looked at famine in retrospect. We saw that shortages of food and water have aggravated mankind since Abraham's time, and probably before. We saw that there are many causes, some natural, and many caused by man. We saw that when Israel did not return to obeying God that He used famines to get their attention and to remind them of their spiritual responsibility to Him. We heard of the horrors that the people of Samaria went through, and much later others during the dark ages suffered.

We reviewed the spiritual side of famine, and how there will be a famine of the hearing of the Word. And, we began to look at the implication of the phrase, "the beginning of sorrows."

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In this second part, we will look at 'Contemporary Famine.' We will see that famine has increased in magnitude, and the cause is mankind.

The Bible does not always indicate the moral and spiritual significance of the famines it records. But, there are still lessons to be learned from them. Those, for example, of Genesis 12:10; Genesis 26:1 and Acts 11:28 are simply stated as historical facts.

The famine referred to in the book of Acts gave opportunity for the first recorded instance of inter-church aid. The congregation of God's church in Syrian Antioch collected a sum of money for the relief of the Jerusalem church, which was suffering from famine.

Acts 11:27-30 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

This incident is very significant because it shows that it has been the responsibility of the members of the church to take care of each other when there is a need; this also helps to strengthen unity within the church. When there was famine affecting other congregations (in this case in Jerusalem) the first instinct of the church at Antioch was to help. Of course, this is what we all should have in our minds whenever we find out that brethren are in need, and we should help in whatever way we can.

It was unthinkable that one part of the church would be in trouble, and that another would do nothing about it. Even though they were far away from the other congregation they had the depth and extent of vision that saw the church as a whole, and so because of the love and concern for the other brethren they gave generously. Jesus had warned the apostles that there would be famines, and that this was only "the beginning of sorrows."

About fifteen years earlier, the disciples of Jesus approached him asking: "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

To feed and strengthen the vision the apostles and the church would later need, Jesus

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gave His disciples a view of what the future held for the church, with regard to the world. During its next two thousand years, the church would see false saviors, wars, famine, pestilence and disease affecting the church as they happened in the world.

Jesus then outlined the events to occur prior to the end of the age and the return of the Messiah. The Olivet Prophecy found in Matthew 24 contains a story flow relating one event to the other.

Christ said there would be: (1) Individuals falsely usurping his authority and power, masquerading as deliverers and saviors, political and religious; (2) Wars and rumors of wars; (3) Famines; and (4) Pestilences and earthquakes. The four conditions that Jesus described in Matthew 24 parallel the Four Horsemen visions as described in Revelation 6.

These disasters come before and only anticipate or look forward to the last days. Jesus said, "The end is not yet", and these are only "the beginning of sorrows."

Various false saviors have come "in Jesus' name" throughout the centuries. These may have promised "deliverance" in terms of better religious, political, social or economic conditions. Wars have ravaged people down through the centuries, and so have famines, pestilence and disease epidemics.

The Black Death alone killed close to one third of the people living in Europe in the 14th century. The worldwide influenza epidemic of 1918 killed twice as many people—maybe as many as twenty million people—as did World War I itself.

Severe famines in China, in 1906 and 1911, were caused by the flooding Yangtze River basin. Russia has also suffered much from famines in recent history. The war-caused famine in Leningrad killed more people by starvation than the United States has lost in all its wars.

Famines have occurred with monotonous frequency throughout the 20th century despite enormous technological, economic and social advances—the Ukraine famine in the 1930s, the Bengal and Dutch famines of the 1940s, the great China famine of the 1950s, Biafra in the late 1960s, famines in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan in the 1970s-90s.

There are many others, though perhaps lesser known. What most of these famines have in common is a shared cause; they were all created by man. I am going to describe some of the man-made famines of the past century because the causes are

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very revealing and will continue to affect our lives on into the future. The accounts are stark, harrowing and shameful. The famines of the 20th century bear striking similarities to the famines of this 21st century.

I am going to describe some of the man-made famines of the past century because the causes are very revealing and will continue to affect our lives on into the future. We should have a good background and understanding, from a physical point of view, of why these famines happen.

Fiona Watson, of the Institute of Child Health, wrote an article in 1999 titled: *One hundred years of famine—A pause for reflection*, from which I am going to use an extensive amount of information to describe to you the causes and how we in this country are susceptible to similar causes as well.

First, I would like to talk about the allied blockade of Germany—March 1915 to 1918. The cause of this in a general sense was war, national welfare and poor agricultural techniques, also hatred was a major factor involved in this one. The allied blockade of Germany began on March 11, 1915 at the outbreak of the World War I. Neutral ships bound for Germany were apprehended at sea, escorted into British or French ports and detained, effectively giving the allies long-range control of German commerce. By September 1916, the British fleet was single handedly intercepting an average of a hundred and thirty five merchant ships every week.

As a result of the blockade, conditions within Germany deteriorated. Unemployment stood at between twenty and forty per cent, and although the Government provided 10.5 Deutsche Marks per week to a family of four in which no one was employed, the benefit of the payment was eroded by soaring inflation. The supply of food declined and rationing was instituted.

Food prices increased as did the lines for rations. As one observer noted: "the daily bread was now a luxury". The collective weight of the German population plummeted sharply. The incidence of actual starvation was reported to be particularly high in jails, asylums, and other institutions where inmates only had access to an unsupplemented food ration. Cases of tuberculosis, rickets, influenza, dysentery, scurvy, and hunger edema became rife. Tuberculosis was reported to be the major cause of death, but was initially limited largely to the elderly. However, tuberculosis began to affect adults and young children, with deterioration of hygienic standards contributing to the spread of the disease.

The human toll was enormous. The number of deaths in Germany increased from

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88,235 in 1915 to 293,760 in 1918. This increase was despite a drop in the birth rate by half between 1914 and 1919. Mortality increases were particularly high among children and the elderly. The death rate of children between the ages of one and five years rose by fifty per cent and among children from five to fifteen years by fifty five per cent. What a sad situation in Germany as a result of the blockade.

Another one I would like to cover is the Soviet Famine—1932-1934. We see in this, such things as stealing, greed, lying and hatred. The evil political system of socialism, collectivism, and violence contributed immensely, if not caused much of the famine itself. Take special note of this one because this is what we may see happen more and more here in the United States, as our political system changes or continues to change.

In 1928, Stalin launched his first five-year plan, which was an ambitious attempt to boost industrialization in the Soviet Union. The plan was to double steel output and triple both pig iron and tractor production within five years. The investment for industrialization was to come from the agricultural sector through collective farms. The aim was to create modern 'socialist agro-towns' which would produce massively increased yields. The collectivization campaign, which began in 1929, was violent, brutal and sudden. Overnight, small peasant holdings were merged into collectives; giant farms covering as much as 247,000 acres. Wages were abolished and a system of work points established, which were paid as a share of the collective's output.

The peasants violently resisted collectivization through armed rebellions, and destroying crops and livestock. Stalin's response was draconian. All collective land, agricultural produce and implements were declared state property and anyone guilty of destroying or damaging them was to be shown no mercy. Peasants were forbidden to leave the countryside without permission while rich peasants (kulaks) were expelled and killed or sent to labor camps. Agricultural production fell by 40 per cent.

Nevertheless, from 1931 to 1933, the forcible seizure of grain was re-introduced and the Soviet Union doubled grain exports to raise hard currency to buy equipment needed for industrialization.

Famine ensued. On average, the peasants were left with a third less grain than they had between 1926 and 1930. The food shortages were most acute in the Soviet Union's richest grain-growing areas, including the Ukraine. The Ukraine was particularly hard hit because Stalin initiated a campaign to crush Ukrainian nationalism and the rebellious Cossacks, who truthfully reported the existence of famine. In 1931, Stalin allowed relief grain to be delivered to all regions except the Ukraine.

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The terrible spring of 1932 was superseded by the even more terrible spring of 1933. Vasily Grossman, a Soviet writer recorded:

When the snow melted true starvation began. People had swollen faces, legs and stomachs. They could not contain their urine...And now they ate anything at all. They caught mice, rats, sparrows, ants, earthworms. They ground up bones into flour, and did the same thing with leather and shoe soles; they cut up old skins and furs to make noodles of a kind and they cooked glue. And when the grass came up, they began to dig up the roots and ate the leaves and the buds; they used everything there was; dandelions, and burdocks and bluebells and willow-root, and sedums and nettles...

Another eyewitness noted that: "...the fertile Ukrainian soil was covered with human corpses...I saw how special brigades gathered the corpses from the streets and houses, and carted them to common graves, or simply threw them in ravines."

The Italian Consul in Kharkov, the capital of Ukraine reported that there was: "a growing commerce in human meat" and that people in the countryside were killing and eating their own children. The authorities responded by distributing posters that read: 'EATING DEAD CHILDREN IS BARBARISM'. People knew that there was food in the cities and desperately tried to flee the countryside. In Kharkov in 1932, the police recovered two hundred and fifty corpses every morning from the railway station.

Despite the massive scale of the famine, a deliberate conspiracy of silence was enforced and doctors were forbidden to disclose on death certificates that the deceased had starved to death. Figures on the number of people who died during the famine in Ukraine are difficult to determine accurately. Estimates vary between five and eight million, equivalent to between ten to twenty five per cent of the entire population of the Ukraine.

This is a very sad situation and it happened not long ago. We are only looking at about seventy to eighty years ago that it happened—in "civilized times."

Another one I wanted to go through as well, bringing us further up toward our time now, by a few years, was The Warsaw Ghetto—November 1940 to July 1942. We see in this, such things as greed, hatred, stealing and lying as culprits and of course, generally speaking, war and racism are major reasons for this.

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The Germans invaded Poland in September, 1939. By March 1941, the population reached a peak of 445,000 Jews in a 3.5 square mile area of Warsaw that normally housed about 160,000. The area was surrounded by a ten foot high wall which had been sealed off on November 15, 1940. Jews were forbidden to go outside the area without permission on penalty of being shot on sight, and no contact with the outside world was allowed. The Germans calculated that they could destroy the population in the Warsaw Ghetto in nine months through mass starvation and the accompanying infectious diseases.

Rationing in Poland had begun in December 1939. While the severe food shortage affected the whole of Warsaw, those outside the ghetto were able to trade with farmers. Inside the ghetto access to food was much worse. The poor hygiene within the ghetto re-ignited typhus and an epidemic flared up. A further hardship was the cold. The electricity to the Ghetto was cut off for extended periods and the practice of sleeping in clothes facilitated the spread of typhus through lice.

People of all ages began to die in droves. Between November 1940 and June 1942, doctors working inside the Ghetto recorded a total of 70,381 deaths, most of which died of starvation.

Because the Jews were able to smuggle some food into the Ghetto, the Germans were unable to starve all the inhabitants. Mass deportation of Jews in the Ghetto to the gas chambers in the extermination camps of Treblinka and Auschwitz began on July 22, 1942 and the Ghetto was finally razed to the ground in May 1943. With all of the effort that the Germans put into trying to starve those people to death they were unable to.

Another one, and I apologize for going through so many, but I really want us to see what some of our lifetimes have been like around the world. The siege of Leningrad—September 1941 to January 1944, and of course, the cause was generally war but also stealing, greed and hatred made it all the worse. In September 1941, Leningrad was surrounded by German forces and the order was issued to "tighten up the blockade and level the city to the ground by shelling from the air". During the nine hundred days of the siege, there was incessant aerial bombing and shelling from long-range guns. The winter of 1941 to 1942 was particularly severe and the coldest in more than a century. A lack of fuel had reduced the power supply, badly affecting heating, and restricting cooking, the water and sewer systems were damaged by shelling, and there were increasing food shortages.

Supplies could not be airlifted in because of the activities of the Luftwaffe, though some provisions could be brought in by truck across the iced-over Lake Ladoga. The ration of

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bread fell to an all time low in December 1941. Not only were the rations small, but the nutritional value of the bread was low, consisting of "about one-half defective rye flour, the rest being substitutes such as cellulose, malt, and bran". The population grew some food in parks and gardens, but was reduced to eating rats, glue from furniture joints and wallpaper.

Weight loss was estimated to be up to thirty three per cent of pre-starvation weight while scurvy, pellagra and night blindness had all appeared by the end of the winter. Diseases such as dysentery, bronchopneumonia and tuberculosis were rampant and a typhus epidemic started but was controlled. Estimates of deaths attributable to starvation during the siege range from 630,000 to 1 million out of a pre-war population of 2.5 million.

There is another very important one that I want to cover, partly because it was the largest of the century but we hardly heard anything about it. Of course, stealing, lying, greed and hatred were contributing factors in this. Foolish government policies, which included confiscation of personal property, forced labor and collectivization of farming all contributed to the Chinese famine from 1958 to 1962.

China has traditionally been a 'land of famine'. The extent of the 1958-62 famine dwarfed previous famines, and yet it remained a secret for over twenty years. It is now seen as the worst famine in recorded history. At least 30 million people had starved to death.

The great Chinese famine took place during Mao's great leap forward, which was launched in January 1958. The 'two generals' that Mao said would modernize China were steel and grain production. Mao, therefore, initiated a crash industrialization program, in which steel output would be doubled or tripled within a year. The entire country set up smelters to create steel in backyard furnaces. Everyone had to meet a quota by handing over their metal possessions ranging from bicycles, iron bedsteads and door knobs to iron griddles, woks and pans. To fire the furnaces, huge numbers of trees had to be cut down. The lumps of metal which emerged from the backyard furnaces were to be used in the mechanization of agriculture. Unfortunately, they turned out to be useless.

Enforced collectivization of agriculture and the obligatory procurement of grain harvests at low prices by the state had been started in the mid-1950s. In 1958, 'people's communes' were established, private plots abolished and communal kitchens set up. State grain procurements were also increased as were grain taxes on peasants. Mao drew up an eight-point blueprint for all Chinese agriculture which every farmer had to follow.

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The results were disastrous including the campaign to reduce pests. The whole country was turned out to make a noise, beating drums and pans, to prevent sparrows from landing anywhere until they fell down dead with exhaustion. Without the birds to prey on them, however, insects multiplied causing damage to crops.

The situation was exacerbated during the period 1959 to 1961 by several natural disasters. As a result, agricultural production dropped dramatically and despite wildly exaggerated claims of bumper harvests reported by Party officials, there were huge food shortages.

By the autumn of 1958, conditions, especially in the predominantly rural areas of the Northern provinces, had begun to deteriorate drastically. The grain in the collective granaries began to run out and food from the collective kitchens became sparser and sparser. Leaves, ground corn stalks, wild grasses and anything else that the peasants could gather were added to the communal pot.

In the autumn of 1959, the grain harvest dropped by at least 30 million tons over that of 1958, but officials reported that it was much higher. The state procurement target was set at 40 per cent of total output and in many places the entire harvest was seized together with all livestock, vegetables and cash crops. Party leaders were sent to villages to search for hidden grain reserves. The peasants were not permitted to cook at home and the 'internal passport' was introduced banning peasants from traveling without permission. It was a brutal and violent campaign.

One of the famine survivors was Mrs. Liu who recalled the winter of 1959-60:

On the muddy path leading from her village, dozens of corpses lay unburied. In the barren fields there were others; and amongst the dead, the survivors crawled slowly on their hands and knees searching for wild grass seeds to eat. In the ponds and ditches people squatted in the mud hunting for frogs and trying to gather weeds. It was winter, and bitterly cold, but...everyone was dressed only in thin and filthy rags tied together with bits of grass and stuffed with straw...Sometimes she saw her neighbors and relatives simply fall down as they shuffled through the village and die without a sound... The dead were left where they died because... no one had the strength to bury them... She remembered, too, the unnatural silence. The village oxen had died, the dogs had been eaten and the chickens and ducks had long ago been confiscated by the Communist Party in lieu of grain taxes. There were no birds left in the trees, and the trees themselves had been stripped of their leaves and bark. At night there was no longer even the scratching of rats and

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mice, for they too had been eaten or had starved to death.

Out of three hundred people who had lived in Mrs. Liu's village at the start of the famine, only eighty survived. China's leaders appeared to have been unaware of the severity of the famine until it was too late to prevent a catastrophe. Grossly exaggerated harvests were reported and those brave enough to suggest that there was a problem—were labeled as 'right-wing opportunists'. As a result, China continued to export grain while the famine raged. Over a three year period from 1958, China doubled grain exports and cut imports of food. It was only in 1961 that China stopped exporting grain and international supplies of grain were called on to compensate for food shortages inside the country, but not until 30 million people had starved to death. That is beyond comprehension and that is just one famine some forty years ago.

The last one I want to give to you is more recent and that is Sudan—1998. Stealing, hatred and greed once again were the major factors, along with drought and military heavy handedness.

South Sudan has been embroiled in war since 1983 and experienced a number of famines since then. The 1988 famine was responsible for an estimated 250,000 deaths in Bahr El Ghazal alone. The 1998 famine, like the 1988 famine, was man made and resulted in an estimated 60,000 deaths. This is less than ten years ago.

An estimated seventy per cent of the population was forced out of their homes and families lost their productive assets such as livestock. Humanitarian agencies operating in the area had to evacuate staff, and programs were disrupted as a result of military raids in April 1998. The devastation caused by the military action came on top of two consecutive years of drought, which not only affected crop yields but had an adverse impact on other important food sources such as wild foods, fish, and grazing land for livestock.

By May the famine was 'visible' with media images showing thousands of southern Sudanese starving and close to death. By July, the famine was advanced with many in the humanitarian assistance community describing the emergency and its scale as one of the worst they had ever witnessed. A number of agencies admitted for the first time that the scale of the problem was overwhelming their capacity and that they were not coping.

Estimates of the population in need of food aid rose monthly from 250,000 in January 1998 to 1,000,000 in August 1998. Mothers were suspected of withholding food from

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their children so that the child would be eligible for treatment at centers and the family would receive the general ration given to the family of admitted children.

Parents were temporarily 'abandoning' their children so that the children would be accepted in care centers for unaccompanied minors.

I went into a fair amount of detail on the twentieth century famines to drive home two points. I apologize for the long narration on that, but I felt it was important for us to really get a good idea of what has happened within most of our lifetimes.

1) All of these famines and horrors were man made through despicable treatment of fellow human beings. Sin caused them! Hatred, lying, greed, stealing and you could probably list a whole lot more sins.

2) The famines of the 20th century, of which I only mentioned the worst, show a mind boggling increase in the number of people who starved to death and in the magnitude of the famines themselves.

Do we need Jesus Christ to return soon? Absolutely! Or, we are going to wipe ourselves off the face of the planet.

We see here in Matthew 24 that Christ is speaking of the Signs of the Times and before the End of the Age. This section of Matthew is parallel to Mark 13:3-8 and Luke 21:7-19.

Matthew 24:3 Now as He sat 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?"

In the parallel account in Mark 13:4, the disciples' question apparently relates only to the date of the destruction of the temple. Here, in Matthew, it is expanded to cover not only the destruction of the temple, but also the sign of Christ's coming and of the close of the age. This last phrase is governed by a single definite article in the Greek, which indicates that 'the coming' (*parousia*) and the 'close of the age' are descriptions of the same event.

The effect is to allow Jesus' reply in the remainder of the chapter to distinguish this event ("the end of the age") from the destruction of the temple, and this is consistently done. But the comparing of the two events by the disciples shows that the destruction of

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the temple was of such momentous significance that to them it seemed that it must be the beginning of the end.

Jesus purposed to broaden their perspective, to make them realize that a continuation without the physical temple until the 'end of the age' was possible, that the end of the temple is not necessarily the end of all things.

The Greek word '*parousia*' meaning 'coming' in verse 3, is used only in this chapter in the Gospels (in verses 3, 27, 37, 39), though in the Epistles it is used several times regarding Jesus' return in glory. Its literal meaning is 'presence,' but it was used for official visits by high-ranking people, state visits, and divine visitation, therefore it is used for Jesus' ultimate return. They asked, "What will be the sign of your presence?"

Matthew 24:4-6 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

False prophets, wars and natural disasters were often interpreted in the ancient world, as 'signs of the end.' But these things are, and always have been, part of human history; they must take place as part of God's overall purpose, not in any specific connection with the end.

Jesus spoke of several major events that would signal the beginning of this time of great trouble. After false prophets and wars comes a third significant indicator mentioned in verse 7 of Matthew 24, "and there will be famines!"

Matthew 24:7-8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. "All these are the beginning of sorrows.

I want to talk a little more about "the beginning of sorrows" as it relates to birth pangs. The original Greek from which the English word 'sorrows' in verse 8 comes literally means 'birth pangs.' It is a period of suffering that must lead up to the end of the age over a long period of time.

It suggests that, while all such events ultimately connect with the end of the age, they

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are far from being its immediate forerunner, and so these events cannot be used to plot our nearness to the end. However, as birth pangs increase in number and magnitude we parents know from experience that the end of the pregnancy is approaching its end.

I know with the birth of our two daughters, our first daughter Stacey took 16 hours to come and so those birth pangs turned into birth pains and they lasted for quite a while and it took a lot longer than we expected. But, Kristy being as she is, could not wait to get out and so the contractions started about six hours before the birth with her but very heavily in 3-1/2 hours they became fast and furious. So, which situation would you choose to determine the end of the age? The longer one or the shorter one? Well we would all like the shorter one, but we just do not know how long because we are not sure of how long those birth pangs will last.

In a general sense, this is the way we feel as we try to wait patiently for Christ's return. The term

"Birth pangs" in the context of Matthew 24:8 reflect Old Testament passages in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea and Micah.

Here are a couple of examples:

Isaiah 26:16-18 LOORD, in trouble they have visited You, They poured out a prayer when Your chastening was upon them. As a woman with child Is in pain and cries out in her pangs, When she draws near the time of her delivery, So have we been in Your sight, O LOORD. We have been with child, we have been in pain; We have, as it were, brought forth wind; We have not accomplished any deliverance in the earth, Nor have the inhabitants of the world fallen.

The time frame here is 'in that day,' this is part of the song that will be sung in Judah.

Micah 4:9-10 Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in your midst? Has your counselor perished? For pangs have seized you like a woman in labor. Be in pain, and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, Like a woman in birth pangs. For now you shall go forth from the city, You shall dwell in the field, And to Babylon you shall go. There you shall be delivered; There the LOORD will redeem you From the hand of your enemies.

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The time frame here is 'in that day;' this is regarding Zion's future triumph.

So, we see that the turmoil in world events, especially regarding Israel, Judah and the church, similar to the sorrows of the mother in child birth, include a period of varying degrees of pain and anguish. As a woman draws near to the end of the pregnancy, especially during the delivery period, pain and anguish increase the sorrows of the mother. This is the situation the world is in today, and we in the church, in a spiritual sense, are as well.

Sadly, wars, famines and earthquakes were a very real part of life on earth in the first century, similar to today, except that the vast numbers of people affected today is enormous compared with the number of people affected in the first century.

Jesus predicted that these things must happen, yet the end was still to come. These are only the beginning of the birth pangs that stretch from Christ's physical birth to His return as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

During this time of man's rule before the return of Christ, conflict is inevitable because of man's proclivity to violence and greed. The conflict extends not only to families, but to nations and even to nature.

The effect of these verses in Matthew 24, then, is not to curb enthusiasm for Christ's return but to warn against false claimants and an expectation of Christ's premature return based on misconstrued signs.

All that is mentioned in Matthew 24:5-8, then, is presented precisely as not being 'signs of the end.' As verse 6 says, "but the end is not yet."

Matthew 24:9-10 Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. "And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.

That word 'tribulation' there is literally afflicted or distressed. This is true and this has been the case since Christ stated this.

The word '*Tote*' is the Greek word from which the word 'then' is translated. In this chapter alone, it occurs in verses 9, 10, 14, 16, 21, 23, 30, and 40. It does not suggest a sequence between verse 9 and 10. Jesus speaks of the time between His comings; it is

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during the birth pangs that Jesus' disciples are persecuted and killed. That is during the last almost two thousand years.

The word 'you' is all inclusive and extends beyond the immediate disciples and includes all the followers Jesus will have. Persecution would break out early and keep on during the birth pangs, against a background of hatred by the whole world.

Still, we are reading about before the Great Tribulation:

mathew 24:11-12 Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.
"And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

In an immediate sense, in talking to His disciples, Jesus is letting them know what they will be up against in their lifetime until the end of their individual lives. Jesus is telling the apostles, and later His church, what they could expect in their lifetimes; and that this endurance would have to go on until He returned.

Matthew 24:13 But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

'To the end' in verse 13 does not necessarily point to the end of the present world but is a standard phrase for 'right through.' It lacks the article that would be needed, as in verse 6 and 14, to refer to 'the End of the world.' Jesus simply means he who endures to the end of his own life shall be saved.

"But he who endures to the end shall be saved" is repeated from Matthew 10:22 where Jesus says, "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved."

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

'Then the end will come' may seem at first to allow the calculation of a date for the final consummation of the world; but that would depend on defining a specific time or situation that could be regarded as 'the preaching of the gospel throughout the whole world.'

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In one sense, Paul could claim long before AD 70 to have 'fully preached the gospel' in a large area of Asia and Europe. At many times since then similar claims could have been made with reference to an area far wider than the 'inhabited area' known in Jesus' time.

But Jesus' words allow no such calculation. The end cannot come until the gospel has reached far outside the inhabitations of the modern day descendants of Israel, but that gives us no warrant for deciding when it must come.

The word translated "world" in verse 14 is translated from the Greek word '*oikoumene*' which literally means 'the inhabited area,' a standard term originally for the Greek world as opposed to the Barbarians.

Then, it became used for the Roman Empire, and subsequently for the whole of the then known world; it is not so much a geographical term that must include every area and community now known to be on earth, but rather it is an indication of the universal offer of the gospel to all nations, that is, not only within one's own nation but outside the confines of one's own nation as well.

Verses 4-14 of Matthew 24 are, in a sense a digression, indicating what are not to be regarded as 'signs of the end.' It is a caution by Jesus Christ to not be assuming that the Great Tribulation is about to start just because there are 'famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.' Jesus' caution is that 'the end is not yet.'

So, the presence of wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilence and disease, and earthquakes are not necessarily signs of Christ's soon return. Had we been in Germany, Russia, China or Sudan during this last century we may have concluded that the end of the world was at hand. The end of their lives as they knew it was certainly at hand for millions of people. But, that does not mean that there will not be these signs between now and Christ's coming, of course there will be as things get worse and worse and worse. Looking at the 20th Century we realize that things were worse then than they had ever been in magnitude and the number of people that were affected.

About sixty years after His Olivet Prophecy, Jesus warned His disciples about the signs to come, He further elaborated on this description when He gave the apostle John the prophecies concerning the Four Horsemen of Revelation in the sixth chapter of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Four Horsemen have a symbolic message. They represent four threads of human suffering throughout the centuries. The effects which the horsemen depict continue

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through time and intensify in the last days.

These four events are the first four of seven "seals." The first four seals are opened prior to the Great Tribulation. They are briefly described in the sixth chapter of Revelation. The seven seals are part of a script written on both sides of a scroll.

The scroll referred to in Revelation was not the same kind of book we use today, made up of many pages bound together. It was one long sheet of parchment, rolled into a scroll. Words were written on both sides. The Revelation scroll had seven seals that had to be "opened" as a reader proceeded through it.

Jesus (the Lamb) is unrolling the scroll and opening each seal. John is invited to see its contents graphically in a vision. Here is what the apostle John writes at the beginning of chapter six.

Revelation 6:1 Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see."

Each of the Four Horsemen of the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is riding a different color steed. They are a white horse, red horse, black horse and pale horse. The horse colors have taken on specific symbolic meanings, such as red for war.

These Four Horsemen coincide with the first four seals of Revelation 6 and are parallel descriptions to the events in Matthew 24:5-12.

Revelation 6:1-2 reveals the first seal, depicted by the white horse and its rider representing conquerors and false religion.

The white horse is mounted by a rider who "had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer." Some have confused this image with the one in Revelation 19, also a rider on a white horse. A quick comparison of chapters 6 and 19 reveals that the two riders have little in common besides riding on white horses.

The horse in chapter six, for example, is bent on conquest. The intent of the rider in chapter 19 is to exact divine and just retribution for sin. Verse 11 says, "He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war."

This rider is called "the Word of God" and "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." The rider

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on the white horse in Revelation 19 is obviously Jesus, the triumphant Messiah coming to rule the world. This is the essential part of what the Feast of Trumpets pictures.

Who, then, is the rider of the white horse in Revelation 6? He is accompanied by three other horses. Their riders portray destruction and death. It would not make sense for this rider to be representing the returning Christ who restores peace on earth. This is very basic in our doctrine and so I feel it necessary just to go over it briefly.

The white horse of Revelation 6 represents those who claim that they can bring humanity what only the true Messiah—Jesus—is capable of delivering. These imposters seek to conquer and destroy those who disagree with them. The one riding that first horse represents the leaders of this earth, whether they be religious, political or economic, who claim that they know how to save us from ourselves or who claim that they know how to give us a better life. It is especially talking about the religious leaders. That not only includes religious leaders in Christianity, but also the Muslim and Buddhist leaders as well.

Revelation 6:3-4 reveals the second seal, depicted by the red horse and its rider as representing conflict and war. The red horse has a rider who takes "peace from the earth" and wields a "great sword." In his wake, people "kill one another."

Revelation 6:5-6 reveals the third seal depicted by the black horse and its rider representing scarcity and famine. The black horse has a rider with "a pair of scales in his hand." A voice accompanies the vision.

Revelation 6:7-8 reveals the fourth seal depicted by the pale horse and its rider representing widespread death, starvation, pestilence and disease. The pale horse has a rider that brings immense suffering to the human race.

We read about these four seals in Matthew 24:5-7. Specifically regarding the third and fourth seals Matthew 24 prophesies this:

Matthew 24:7-8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

In Revelation 6, the apostle John is giving an account not of the end of things, but of the signs and events that precede the end.

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Revelation 6:5-6 When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine."

The proclamation of the opened third seal of Revelation 6:6 indicates that food prices would be up to ten times as high as in normal times.

The denarius was a Roman silver coin and was equal in value to the daily wage of a working man. Anciently, oil and wine were not luxuries. They were basic commodities of life. Grain, new wine and oil was a standard threesome describing the staples of life.

Deuteronomy 7:13 And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock, in the land of which He swore to your fathers to give you.

Just pointing out there that your grain and your new wine and oil are tied together in this very common phrase.

Hosea 2:8 For she [Israel] did not know that I [God] gave her grain, new wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold—Which they [the children of Israel] prepared for Baal.

God provided their needs, grain, new wine and oil, but Israel turned around and squandered it to false gods and leaders.

We can see that this rider represents hunger and famine. He carries a scale to measure and carefully dole out food. This rider stands for a time when basic goods are sold at greatly inflated prices. There is a scarcity of things to eat. People are told to be careful not to harm precious foodstuffs.

These are the conditions Jesus speaks of in Matthew 24:5-12. Jesus Christ was describing an age of human existence that was unique from all others in which widespread famine was only one of many interrelated events.

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The fourth seal coincides with the pale horse whose rider brings on increased war, increased hunger, increased deaths and adds pestilence to the scourge.

Right now in West Africa, an estimated 3.6 million people are in critical need of food, including 800,000 children under the age of five who are at risk of starvation. In the past year, drought and locust swarms (pestilence) have devastated crops throughout Nigeria and other parts of West Africa.

300,000 families in the Philippines are under severe hunger because of severe drought.

Revelation 6:8 indicates that hunger would play a part in the judgments unleashed when the fourth seal was broken. This is still within the time frame of the beginning of sorrows; and is pre-tribulation.

Revelation 6:7-8 When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.

I just read, in one of the world's statistics, by the end of this year one in six nations will have some form of hunger problem within their nation ranging from moderate to severe hunger to starvation. If you take into consideration the amount of starvation that is going on in some of these larger nations like India and China if you were to calculate those I believe and suppose that you would probably come up with this one fourth of the earth is affected by hunger and starvation. three quarters appear not to be distressed in this way during this pre-tribulation period.

The pale horse has a rider called "Death and Hades." Pale is the color of a corpse. The Greek word for "pale" is chloros and elsewhere in Revelation it describes the yellow-green of vegetation. It is used here for the telltale and sickly look of death due to a virulent pestilence.

The phrase, "over a fourth of the earth" implies that the whole earth is not affected by the pale horse. Three quarters of the earth are not affected if we take this at surface value.

Today, worldwide famine is built into the structure of world society. Famine is now a way of life for millions of people. Weather fluctuations, wars and crop failures only serve to

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exacerbate existing conditions.

Today's famines also differ in both nature and size from those of the past. Never before did multiple hundreds of millions of people suffer from hunger and malnutrition at any given period in history as they do today and have since Jesus prophesied to the disciples.

To illustrate the plight of the world right now, let me read the 2005 Unicef USA statistics:

640 million children do not have adequate shelter.

500 million children have no access to sanitation.

400 million children do not have access to safe water.

90 million children are severely food-deprived.

800 million plus people are undernourished.

This is an unbelievable, horrible condition for mankind right now as we live.

The three countries suffering from continuing, almost perpetual, famine are under authoritarian, military rule. They are North Korea, Ethiopia, and Sudan.

In the Darfur region of Sudan, 70,000 people have already died in brutal ethnic conflict, and over two million people have been driven homeless with their huts and villages pillaged, burned, and destroyed.

A critical food shortage threatens starvation for 18.1 million people in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho, Swaziland, and other countries in central and southern Africa.

There are 100 million homeless children, starving, stealing, selling drugs, or prostituting themselves to survive. They are victims of poverty, war, natural disaster, and disease. It is estimated that more than six million children under the age of five die every year as a result of hunger and the sins of mankind.

As appalling as all of these events have been, Jesus said we should not see them as necessarily synonymous with 'the last days.' They only give us a hint of worse to come in the last days just prior to Jesus' second coming.

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All one need do is survey just one of the many sorrows and sufferings impacting this world—in this case "famine"—to realize that this world desperately needs Jesus Christ to return and to set up God's benevolent government on earth.

As horrible as the suffering is for many in this world, we are assured that if we repent of our sins; overcome Satan, the world and our own human nature; and obey God, living our lives as Jesus demonstrated then we can be confident that God will not put more on us than we can handle. We need not fear such things as famine.

And if God decides that we must suffer in some way, He promises that He will give us the strength and perseverance to bear up under it.

As hard as it is to believe God's people shall laugh at famine. When disaster hits a godly man, he recognizes this as part of God's training, and so can rejoice in adversity.

In the early part of the fifth chapter of the Book of Job, we are assured that the wicked are confounded and the good are helped.

Troubles are tests; the person who realizes this responds positively and creatively. He is an optimist! The rebellious only make more trouble for themselves by their resentment. And so, today we live in a world that resents the Israelitish nations for their own war, famine and pestilence problems. Because, for the most part, the descendents of Israel are not having famine problems, yet! God has certainly blessed us!

The book of Job is a wonderfully encouraging acknowledgment of the fatherly care of God, strict but kind. His apparent severity in sending sickness, setbacks, famine and war, fire and flood, plagues and wild beasts—is more than outweighed by His goodness in sending remedies for all these disasters. At least that is how it will work out for the faithful person who is not impatient with God's chastening.

Job 5:17-22 "Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; Therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty. For He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole. He shall deliver you in six troubles, Yes, in seven no evil shall touch you. In famine He shall redeem you from death, And in war from the power of the sword. You shall be hidden from the scourge of the tongue, And you shall not be afraid of destruction when it comes. You shall laugh at destruction and famine, And you shall not be afraid of the beasts of the earth.

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The statement "You shall laugh at destruction and famine" most forcibly expresses the strongest security we can have, and absolute confidence in that security. Verse 22 sounds like a reference to the third and fourth seals of the Revelation, talking about destruction, famine and pestilence.

We have a guarantee of safety and happiness in the face of God's chastisement. There is a difference between God's chastisement and His vengeance. When adversity comes near us we will smile with confidence in our secure state.

But, how can we laugh at destruction and famine?

In verse 22, the word rendered 'famine' in the Hebrew is '*kaapaan*' and is an unusual word that is different from the word 'famine' in verse 20. In verse 20, 'famine' means simply: to be very hungry, or to be starving.

But in verse 22, it means something more than the physical condition of hunger. It implies: to languish, to pine from hunger and thirst. It refers to the feeling, the anguish that comes, not only from feeling extremely hungry, but the anticipation of it along with anxiety.

So, God makes His people courageous when they need to face calamity. The truly good man who receives chastening from God will always be rescued by His Creator.

In verse 22, the word "laugh" in the Hebrew means to laugh with pleasure, to laugh because of the wonderful assurance that we feel because we know that destruction and famine are held at bay by our loving Father in Heaven. God takes a personal interest in us because we are the apple of His eye. We do not have any need to worry and have anxiety of such things as famine, pestilence and disease.

What I have shown you today is a survey, in a sense, of contemporary famine, that is famine around our lifetimes.

In Part 3 we will look at the Future of Famine and that God will change it to fertility. It is a very uplifting, exciting and desirable thing to be able to look forward. God always rescues His people from such things and the end result is always blessings and wonderful mercy.