

Mark 13:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows.

Analysis

Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom—escalating conflict beyond individual wars to regional/global upheaval. **Earthquakes in divers places... famines and troubles**—natural disasters accompanying human conflict. The Greek *seismoι* (σεισμοί, earthquakes) and *limoi* (λιμοί, famines) describe physical catastrophes. **These are the beginnings of sorrows** (Greek *archai ōdinōn, ἀρχαὶ ὠδίνων*)—literally 'birth pains begin.'

The birth pain metaphor (common in prophetic literature—Isaiah 13:8; Jeremiah 4:31) indicates suffering precedes new creation. Birth pains increase in frequency and intensity before delivery. Similarly, human history experiences intensifying upheaval before Christ's return and new heaven/earth (Revelation 21:1-5). But birth pains aren't the birth itself—they signal it approaches without specifying timing. The metaphor encourages perseverance: pain has purpose, leading to joy (John 16:21-22).

Historical Context

First century witnessed earthquakes (Pompeii AD 62, preceding Vesuvius AD 79; Laodicea AD 60), famines (Acts 11:28 records famine under Claudius ca. AD 46), widespread conflict (Roman civil wars, Judean revolt). Church fathers noted these

fulfillments. Subsequent history records continuous earthquakes, famines, wars—Medieval famines, Black Death, colonial exploitation famines, twentieth-century genocides, ongoing hunger. Each era sees birth pains. Modern environmental concerns, nuclear threats, pandemics continue the pattern. Jesus' point isn't that these uniquely signal His return, but that fallen world continuously experiences such until He returns. Christians shouldn't be surprised or shaken by disasters—expect them as birth pains awaiting consummation.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the 'birth pain' metaphor shape Christian response to natural disasters and global suffering—avoiding both despair and naive triumphalism?
2. What distinguishes Jesus' 'beginning of sorrows' from the final end—and why does this distinction matter for Christian living?
3. How should awareness that history experiences increasing 'birth pains' affect Christian hope and endurance?

Interlinear Text

ἐγερθήσεται	γὰρ	ἔθνος	ἐπὶ	ἔθνος	καὶ	βασιλείαν	ἐπὶ
shall rise	For	nation	against	nation	and	kingdom	against
G1453	G1063	G1484	G1909	G1484	G2532	G932	G1909
βασιλείαν	καὶ	ἔσονται	σεισμοὶ	κατὰ	τόπους	καὶ	
kingdom	and	there shall be	earthquakes	in divers	places	and	
G932	G2532	G2071	G4578	G2596	G5117	G2532	
ἔσονται	λιμοὶ	καὶ	ταραχαί·	ἀρχαὶ	ὠδίνων		
there shall be	famines	and	troubles	are the beginnings	of sorrows		
G2071	G3042	G2532	G5016	G746	G5604		
ταῦτα							
these							
G5023							

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 37:3 (Parallel theme): And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.

Psalms 48:6 (Parallel theme): Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail.

Matthew 24:8 (Parallel theme): All these are the beginning of sorrows.