

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 seismoi (σεισμοί, earthquakes) and limoi (λιμοί, famines) describe physical catastrophes. **These are the beginnings of sorrows** (Greek archai ὄδινον, ἀρχαὶ ὡδίνων)—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 ἐπὶ¹
shall rise For nation against nation and kingdom against
G1453 G1063 G1484 G1909 G1484 G2532 G932 G1909
βασιλείαν καὶ ἔσονται σεισμοὶ κατὰ τόπους καὶ²
kingdom and there shall be earthquakes in divers places and
G932 G2532 G2071 G4578 G2596 G5117 G2532
ἔσονται λιμοὶ καὶ ταραχαί· ἀρχαὶ ὡδίνων
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.