

# Birth Pangs and the Time of Sorrows

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Yeshua:

Yeshua's disciples came to him one day and asked: *"What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3, NKJV).* Yeshua then began to tell His disciples about all the difficult things that would happen at the end of the age, especially to the nation of Israel—deception, wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes and more.<sup>ii</sup> Then He said, *"All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:8),* but the end would not come immediately.<sup>iii</sup>

Yeshua was informing His disciples and, therefore, also the Jewish people today that things in the world will become increasingly more difficult, intensifying, and culminating in a chaotic global period called "the tribulation." Paul called these difficulties "birth pangs," which he compared to the contractions (*tzi'rim* in Hebrew) of a woman in labor. Thus, it is written, *"For pangs have seized you like a woman in labor. Be in pain, and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion" (Micah 4:10).*

So, what exactly are these birth pangs, and why does Paul liken them to labor contractions? Let us find out.

The Hebrew word for contraction (taken from the same root) is *tzim'tzum*, and it has two meanings: one is "contraction" or "condensation," and the other is "concealment." An example of a contraction would be if someone boarded up a window and left a tiny hole through which the light could pass. Even though the light is restricted in its quantity, the overall quality is the same as the source.

Alternately, concealment would be as if someone hung a curtain over a window to block or filter out the sunlight. However, the light entering the room through the curtain would be of an entirely different quality. It would be filtered and a mere shadow of the original light.<sup>iv</sup>

We see a picture of this type of concealment in the veil that hung in the Temple. This veil separated the inner sanctuary from the Holy of Holies and the light of God.<sup>v</sup> We read, *"Truly You are God, who hide Yourself, O God of Israel, the Savior!" (Isaiah 45:15).*

Paul used a similar analogy (emphasis added) when he said: *"Even to this day, when [the Law of] Moses is read, a veil [that conceals the light of God] lies on their [Israel's] heart. Nevertheless, when one turns to the Lord [to Yeshua, the light of the world], the veil [that conceals the light of God] is taken away" (2 Corinthians 3:16).*

The rabbis consider this progressive contraction and concealment of God's infinite light to be a manifestation of God's strength (*gevurah* in Hebrew). However, they also liken it to His severity and stern judgments; as it is written, *"He made darkness His secret place; His canopy around Him was dark waters and thick clouds of the skies"* (Psalm 18:11).

In other words, a contraction is a form of God's judgment. These judgments reveal to the creation one of God's many attributes, mainly His Wisdom (*chochmah* in Hebrew).<sup>vi</sup> We read, *"For when Your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness"* (Isaiah 26:9).

It is precisely this demonstration of God's strength and wisdom in our lives (and in the world) that will give us the discipline and spiritual maturity to prepare for the chaos and ultimate deliverance that will come at the end of the age.<sup>vii</sup> Thus, Yeshua said, *"He who endures to the end will be saved"* (Matthew 10:22).

The rabbis further teach us that God's Divine left hand represents His judgment and is the supernal attribute of fear and severity. In contrast, His right hand of love and kindness embraces us, which is the supernal attribute of mercy.<sup>viii</sup> God's judgments and severity are, therefore, tempered by His mercy (*chesed* in Hebrew). Thus, love and kindness are God's "right arm," while fear and severity are His "left arm," as it is written, *"To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"* (Isaiah 53:1).

Paul said it like this: *"Consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness"* (Romans 11:22). Paul was speaking about the severity of God's Law, which concealed the light of God and resulted in God's judgments on all who violated it. So, we read, *"As many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law"* (Romans 2:12).

For this reason, Jewish men are commanded to bind phylacteries (called *Tefillin*) on their left arm, indicating they were bound to the left hand of God and His judgments according to the Law of Moses.<sup>ix</sup> The left hand is closer to the heart and reminds us that our obedience to God's Law is out of submission to His will, as it is written, *"Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart..."* (Deuteronomy 10:16).

Regarding the Goodness of the Lord, Paul spoke to the New Covenant, which is in Christ. Therefore, he is the right arm of God's mercy revealed to all humanity, as it is written, *"Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life"* (Jude 1:21). Therefore Paul said (emphasis added), *"The letter [of the law, which is God's severity] kills, but the Spirit [of God's mercy] gives life"* (2 Corinthians 3:6).

The word "contraction" is also the term for the incremental creation process by which an infinite God could express Himself in a finite realm.<sup>x</sup> The rabbis suggest that in creation, the infinite and endless Divine emanation of God had to first contract itself into a space that would be void of

His presence, creating what is called a "primordial void" within which the creation of finite and physical substance could become possible.<sup>xi</sup>

In other words, the infinite light of God was "severely" condensed and contracted to such a degree that it could emanate and illuminate *finitely*. The resultant light is referred to as an indwelling light (*pnimi* in Hebrew), which is a light that inwardly vests itself within all created beings.<sup>xii</sup> This light is what gives life to men; as it is written, "*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being*" (Genesis 2:7).

This idea of God's condensation and contraction is inconceivable to the human mind. How can infinite God limit or confine Himself to a finite realm?

This is an unanswerable question. God is transcendent and immanent, meaning He is both unsearchable and infinitely separate from His creation. However, He is also intimately and finitely bound to it. For this reason, many people struggle with the divinity of Christ, which is precisely why the Jewish people stumbled at the Messiah's first appearance.<sup>xiii</sup>

This primordial void of creation is called *tehiru* and stems from the Hebrew root word *tohu*, which means to be "confused" or "astounded." Using the common English translation in Genesis, we read: "*The earth was without form, and void.*" However, a more accurate and expounded translation would be as follows: "*The earth was in a state of confusion.*"

Since this condition never existed outside the perfection and order of God (who is pure light), the rabbis surmise that the Spirit of God looked upon this newly formed creation with an aura of astonishment and amazement. This response would be similar to the look a woman has when she gazes into the eyes of her newborn child.

There is a fable about light and darkness which states that darkness does not exist. Why do people make this assumption?

Because scientists presumably cannot measure darkness, they measure light. Therefore, they conclude that darkness is merely the absence of light. In truth, scientists are now discovering dark matter which can be physically quantified.

Still, the analogy reveals a simple fact, that God, who is light, exists everywhere and is all-encompassing, and anything that exists apart from Him lives in a reduced state of revelation, or conversely in an induced state of concealment, which is darkness. Therefore, God is not only transcendent from His creation; He is also hidden from it.

This truth about God's transcendence yields another great question: why would God hide in the first place?

The rabbis teach that God hid from creation, not to destroy it by the power of His presence. However, I believe a more profound and spiritually significant lesson you can learn about in our teaching is: "Why Did God Choose Abram?"

When people ask why there is darkness in the world, a simple answer given is that God's light is absent from it. When they ask why evil in the world, they are told there is an absence of God's Divine immanence, as just discovered, that God has contracted Himself to the degree that gives men the freedom to choose good or evil. Sadly, men have rebelliously decided to commit evil.

Let us explore this concept further, being careful not to oversimplify this analogy because it is also written, *"And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it"* (John 1:5). How can darkness comprehend anything if it does not exist?

Well, it does exist in the personification of what the Bible calls "the evil one" (who is Satan) and "the one who commits evil," being those who follow him. As it is written, *"This is the condemnation, that the light [Yeshua] has come into the world, and men loved darkness [Satan] rather than light, because their deeds were evil"* (John 3:19).

We can surmise that both light and darkness have physical manifestations in the world, one being the imminence of Christ (Yeshua) and the other being the manifestation of the Anti-Christ (Satan).<sup>xiv</sup> We will now learn about what will happen at the end of the age at the revealing of "the evil one." To do so, we must first look at the beginning of creation.

The rabbis teach us that creation and prophecy (the word of God) are bound up in each other—one being the beginning of the Bible (the written word) and the other its end (the written word made flesh who is Christ the Lord). I have added Messianic emphasis to this understanding. In other words, the mystery of the end of the age is concealed in the creation.<sup>xv</sup>

In Genesis, we see the revelation of God's light on the first day when He said, *"Let there be light."* But then, on the fourth day, we see God's concealment of this light when He created the Sun and the Moon to provide a lesser quality light to shine upon the earth in place of His Divine immanence.<sup>xvi</sup>

However, at the end of the age when God creates the new heaven and new earth, we read, *"The city [the New Jerusalem] had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light"* (Revelation 21:23). Hallelujah and praise the Lord! We will no longer live in the concealment of God's light, but we will be fully immersed in it.

Suppose the ends are concealed in the beginnings, and the origins are marked by "severe" contractions that manifested God's strength (His judgments) through which He brought creation into existence. In that case, we can conclude that for God to birth a new creation; He will once again manifest His strength through "severe" contractions (judgments) at the end of the age.

We read, *"See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven'"* (Hebrews 12:25-26).

In other words, the heavens and the earth will experience a period of "birth pangs," severe judgments that will violently shake the heavens and the earth. Through this period, God will gradually, and then more intensely, contract His light out of the world until only the manifestation of darkness remains. Then, finally, these last vestiges of God's light will emanate through His church until even we are removed.

Here is what scripture confirms for us about this time of darkness:

*"The night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4).*

*"For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people..." (Isaiah 60:2).*

*"The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion [deep darkness], that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).*

*"And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day" (Jude 1:6).*

*"The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31).*

Praise the Lord that He has promised to cut these days short!<sup>xvii</sup> When things appear to be the darkest in the world, and when God's light is most contracted and concealed from the earth, the Lord will appear with the brightness of His coming.

We read (emphasis added), *"And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way [i.e., contracted and concealed]. And then the lawless [evil] one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming" (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8).*

The church, the bride of Yeshua, will also appear with Christ at the brightness of His coming.<sup>xviii</sup> As it is written, *"Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:3).*

The Bible is filled with prophecies about what will happen at the end of the age. The books of Revelation and Matthew make it clear that the power of the Anti-Christ will prevail over the unsaved remnant of Israel during this time, and many will grow cold and fall away from the Lord because of the evil they see flourishing all around them.<sup>xix</sup>

The Lord decreed: *“Seventy weeks are determined for your people [Israel] and for your holy city [Jerusalem], To finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy”* (Daniel 9:24). This period is God’s appointed season of judgment against all the nations that have rejected Him and includes Israel.

Yeshua told His disciples, *“You shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’”* (Matthew 23:39). Yes, God will hide and conceal Himself from Israel until she is brought low and humbled, as the Lord declared, *“I will leave in your midst A meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord”* (Zephaniah 3:12).

At the end of Israel’s tribulation, at what appears to be their imminent destruction, when all the powers of Satan have been unleashed against them, the Lord will birth a miracle. His anointed one, the Messiah Yeshua, the King of all kings, will midwife the birth of His great nation—Israel.<sup>xx</sup>

At the last trumpet, the Jewish people shall be saved, and Israel (as a nation) shall be genuinely born,<sup>xxi</sup> just as it is written, *“Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion was in labor, She gave birth to her children”* (Isaiah 66:8).

The destiny of the Jewish people is still for them to become holy people and a light to all the nations.<sup>xxii</sup> This cannot happen unless the Lord first refines His people,<sup>xxiii</sup> especially the refinement of persecution leading to death and resurrection. As we read, *“Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!’ Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.’”* (Ezekiel 37:11).

The rabbis teach that the radiation of light (God’s glory) at the time of the resurrection will be in a state of expansion, which is the opposite of contraction, and its measure will be both limitless and endless.<sup>xxiv</sup> Rabbi Moshe Chayim Luzzatto specifically wrote, “The Creator designed our physical bodies for the concealment of His light, but He created our souls for His eternal revelation.”<sup>xxv</sup> And Yeshua told His disciples, *“The glory which You [the Father] gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one”* (John 17:22).

Wow! God’s glory will one day be fully revealed through His people—Israel—as an infinite manifestation of His light. Yes, Israel will become a light unto all the nations. And those grafted into her from the nations will join Israel as the great assembly of God’s people (the *ecclesia* and the church), sharing in God’s glory and radiating His light into every tribe and tongue and people and nation for all eternity.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Amen!

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- <sup>i</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.
- <sup>ii</sup> Matthew 24:4-7.
- <sup>iii</sup> Luke 21:9.
- <sup>iv</sup> The *Tanya* of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. Elucidated by Rabbi Yosef Wineberg. Translated from Yiddish by Rabbi Levy Wineberg and Rabbi Sholom B. Wineberg. Edited by Uri Kaploun. Published and copyright by Kehot Publication Society.
- <sup>v</sup> Matthew 27:51.
- <sup>vi</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:16.
- <sup>vii</sup> Meyerhoff-Hieronimus, J. Zohara. *Kabbalistic Teachings of the Female Prophets*. Inner Traditions, Rochester, Vermont. 2008.
- <sup>viii</sup> Ibid. The *Tanya* of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi.
- <sup>ix</sup> Shurpin, Yehuda. *Why Is Tefillin Worn on the Left Arm?* Chabad.org.
- <sup>x</sup> Samuel, Gabriella. *The Kabbalah Handbook*. Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc., New York. 2007.
- <sup>xi</sup> Ibid. The *Tanya* of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi.
- <sup>xii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xiii</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:23.
- <sup>xiv</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10.
- <sup>xv</sup> Ibid. The *Kabbalah Handbook*.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Genesis 1:3 & 14.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Matthew 24:22.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Zechariah 14:5.
- <sup>xix</sup> Revelation 12:17 & 13:7-10, Matthew 24:9-13.
- <sup>xx</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xxi</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:52.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Daniel 12:10.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Ibid. The *Tanya* of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Rabbi Luzzatto, Moshe Chayim. *The Knowing Heart: Da'Ath Tevunoth (Hebrew and English Edition, translated by Shraga Silverstein)*. Feldheim Pub; Bilingual edition. December 2003.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Ephesians 3:6, Revelation 5:9.