

## **THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION Past or Future?**

By

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If you would eliminate all the prophecy that has already been fulfilled, you would eliminate about 90% of today's prophetic preaching and writing!

A classic example of modern prophets predicting something which has already come to pass is the one concerning the "abomination of desolation," an expression used by Jesus in Matthew 24. Perhaps you have heard this futuristic interpretation given by a pre-millennial preacher: "The Jews (having restored Herod's Temple) will have a visit by the False Prophet who shall bring an image of the Anti-Christ into Jerusalem and set it in the temple...that will be the sign Jesus mentioned in Mt. 24, the Abomination of Desolation." Or this: "This image will be placed in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, and is the "abomination of desolation..." (DeHaan).

These same futurist preachers, who make up the majority of radio and TV preachers, and fill most of the religious magazines with their interpretations, succeed in keeping millions from a settled faith in Christ and an understanding of His words.

The setting for the prophecy is the Temple in Jerusalem, so rich and grand that the disciples openly admired its magnificence. Jesus said, "Varily I say unto you, thee shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Mt. 24:2).

This was a shocking statement, considering the huge size of the temple stones. The disciples requested, "Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and the end of the world?" (Mt. 24:3). First, Jesus pointed out that there would be false messiahs, earthquakes, wars, etc., and that in the face of these the saints were to endure and the gospel was to be preached. Then, He answered the question concerning the destruction of the temple which then stood. For a right interpretation, we need to read the account as given in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Matthew: "When therefore you see the abomination of desolation, which spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that reads understand) then let them that are in Judea flee unto the mountains" (Mt. 24:15-16).

Mark: "But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not (let him that reads understand), then let them that are in Judea flee unto the mountains" (Mark 13:14).

Luke: "But when you see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand. Then let them that are in Judea flee unto the mountains...and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:20-21, 24).

While Matthew and Mark quote directly from Daniel, using Daniel's expression, "abomination of desolation," Dr. Luke plainly reveals that what they would see would be armies surrounding the city, about to bring about her desolation.

Reference to Daniel has to do with his "70 weeks" prediction, at the end of which he writes "and upon the wing of abomination shall come one that makes desolate; and even unto the full end, and that determined, shall wrath be poured out upon the desolate" (Dan. 9:27). The question of the disciples concerned the destruction of the temple, while

the prophecy of Daniel predicted the complete desolation of both temple and city. According to Luke's account the desolation was to be accomplished by armies.

To the residents of Jerusalem nothing was more "abominable" than the idolatrous Romans. As they looked out over the walls of the city and saw Roman legions advancing for the purpose of destroying them, they would easily understand the term "abomination of desolation" and realize that it was upon them.

The "abomination of desolation" was to be seen standing in the "holy place," or "where he ought not." Many have taken this to mean an object standing in the Holy of Holies in the temple. But there are four things that disallow that interpretation. (1) Only the High Priests were allowed in the Holy of Holies, therefore the people would never see this object in order to be warned to flee. (2) The enemy would never be allowed to place an "abominable" object in the temple unless the city were already in enemy hands. By that time, it would be too late for the Christians to flee; therefore, this could be no sign to them to flee to the mountains. (3) Luke plainly says that what they are to see is "Jerusalem compassed with armies...." (4) The prophecy has to do with the destruction of the temple, not something placed inside it.

As for the "Holy Place," this term was used not only for the temple, but for the surrounding court and for the entire city, which they often called the "Holy City."

The prophecy is not nearly so cryptic as modern interpreters would have us believe. Jesus simply told the disciples that the great temple would be destroyed, along with the entire city. However, it was not to take place right away. These same disciples were told to remain in Jerusalem until they received power (the holy Spirit) and that they were to preach the gospel in Jerusalem first. Therefore they were told that there would be wars, rumors of war, famine and other great catastrophes, false Christs and persecution. When the destruction was imminent, they would know it in time to flee, and the clear sign would be the siege of Jerusalem by foreign armies. This was a sign that no one could mistake.

In 65 AD Florus was appointed Caesar's procurator over Judea. Determined to put down the Jewish resistance to Rome and do away with radical rebels, he imposed such strong measures that thousands of Jews arose in violent rebellion. History records a period when all of Judea and Galilee were filled with violence. Roman armies would attack a village to smoke out the rebels; in retaliation, guerilla bands would attack Gentiles, slaughtering whole communities; the response would be an even greater blow by the Romans against Jews, followed by a massacre led by Jewish rebels.

When Florus couldn't quell the rebels Cestius Gaius took over, and marched the Roman armies into Palestine, destroyed resistance in all the towns on his way toward Jerusalem, and laid siege to that city.

Here was the sign, the "abomination of desolation" standing in the place holy to all Israelites. But how could they flee? The city was under siege, and the armies of Cestius were easily winning the battle. Then for some unexplained reason, as the historian Josephus says, "without any reason in the world," he withdrew all the troops. The Jews thought that God had given them the victory, and pursued the Roman army and inflicted heavy casualties. Soon a new General, Titus, would take command and return with greater forces, but in the meantime there was an interval during which all the Christians, following Christ's warning, fled. According to Thomas Newton: "We learn from ecclesiastical histories, that at this juncture all who believed in Christ departed

Jerusalem, and removed to Pella and other places beyond the river Jordan; so that they all marvelously escaped the general shipwreck of their countrymen; and we do not read anywhere that so much as one of them perished in the destruction of Jerusalem” (Disertations on the Prophecies, pg., 389, See “great Prophecies of the Bible,” Ralph Woodrow and “The Olivet Discourse” by Dallas Meserve).

After the Christians had fled, Titus besieged the city, and the woes that befell Jerusalem were what Jesus called “great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Mt. 24:21). Josephus, a Jewish historian, was an eye-witness to the events and describes them in “Wars of the Jews,” published about 75 AD. He wrote of cities filled with the dead, houses plundered and burned. In one hour over 20,000 were killed in Caesarea, and Galilee was filled with fire and blood!

In Jerusalem the Zealots “fell upon the people (who disagreed with them) as upon a flock of profane animals, and cut their throats.” Over 12,000 prominent people died in this way. As the siege continued food became scarce, so that neighbor preyed upon neighbor to obtain food. When it was known that someone possessed food, he was tortured to make him reveal his source, and then usually killed by his greedy countrymen. Josephus relates horrendous systems of torture they used on each other to extract money, in order to buy food from the powerful ones, who had hopes of being delivered before themselves perishing. “The number of those that perished by famine in the city was prodigious, and their miseries were unspeakable. For it so much as the shadow or any kind of food did anywhere appear, a war was commenced presently, and the dearest friends fell fighting one another about it...” One prominent woman killed her infant son and roasted him. After eating half of the body, the other half was hidden. She was forced to uncover the remaining half of the little body, saying: ‘Come, eat of this food,’ for I have eaten of it myself...’.”

Titus had wanted to preserve the temple. But when he finally entered the city one of the enraged soldiers entered the temple with a torch and set it afire. The heat became so intense that it melted the gold inlay so that it ran down into the crevices of the building stones. Eager to extricate this valuable metal, the Romans pulled down one stone from off another, to fulfill Christ’s prophecy, “There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.”

The 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel (Dan. 9:25–27) was completed by the events during the ministry of Christ, His death, and the three and one half years following His resurrection during which time thousands turned from the Old Covenant and received the New Covenant of Christ. As in other times a grace period of 40 years was given before the final destruction and end of the nation. During that time the Jews fulfilled another of Christ’s predictions, that the disciples would endure great persecution from their countrymen and unbelieving members of their families, by which the Jews would “fill up the full measure of God’s wrath for them” (Mt. 23:32, 34–36). Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation” (Mt. 23:36), plainly indicating that the destruction of Jerusalem was the result of their rebellion against Christ and His people. At the end of that 40 years, God’s wrath was poured out upon the nation through Roman armies in 70 AD. It is History.

Although it was Titus and pagan armies that made up the abomination of desolation, they were merely carrying out the divine judgment of God, the sentence of destruction Jesus had pronounced upon the city over 40 years earlier.

As Ralph Woodrow comments, “This interpretation is solidly built on the Bible. With it, the gospel accounts are complementary, not contradictory. It is confirmed by history. It glorifies Christ, for it plainly demonstrates how his words were fulfilled and his warnings heeded — thus providing a great deliverance and blessing for the Christian people of that time!”

To place fulfilled prophecy yet into the future is to deny the word of Christ. To show His prophecies fulfilled establishes His words, exalts Him and gives great assurance to the believer.

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