

The Abomination of Desolation (Matthew 24:15-22)

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The Context of Matthew 24

- Verses 1-2, Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple (first presentation).
 - A *bona fide* offer of a king to Israel in fulfillment of the promises of a ruler on the throne of David.
 - This was God's divine judgment upon the Jews having rejected their prophesied king.
 - Postponement of Messianic kingdom: the continuation of the Times of the Gentiles which began earlier with overthrow of the last king to sit on the throne of David at the time of the Babylonian overthrow and captivity in 586 B.C.
 - The disciples ask for information concerning the timing of:
 1. The destruction of the Jewish Temple
 2. Your coming and . . .
 3. . . . the end of the age
- Verses 3-8, Jesus gives *three sure signs*, one now past and two yet future
 1. *When will these things [the destruction of the Temple] be?* Luke: "when you see . . . Jerusalem surrounded by armies." The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by Titus of Rome in A.D. 70.
 2. *What will be the sign of your coming?* Matthew, Mark, and Luke: the sign of the Son of Man in heaven which will be global and unmistakable, marking the unambiguous return of Jesus
 3. *What will be the sign of the end of the age?* Matthew and Mark: "when you see . . . the Abomination of Desolation standing in the holy place, where it ought not to be" - yet future

Mat. 24:15-22

"Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened."¹

Therefore

- When we see a *therefore* we always want to ask the question: what is the conjunction therefore “there for?”
- In verses 9-14, Jesus has just described the characteristics of the end of the age which follow upon the “beginning of sorrows” described in verses 4-8.
 1. Christians will be hated and killed by all nations.
 2. Professing Christians will betray true Christians.
 3. A time of global lawlessness.
- *Because* it will be a time of great peril for believers, Jesus is now revealing the event which *marks* the beginning of final intense period of persecution prior to his return at the end of the age.

Something Unmistakable

“When you see . . . then let those who are in Judea flee” (Mat. [24:15](#))

- Although this event will be “seen” more widely than the immediate environs where it takes place, it has the greatest significance for those who are nearby - in Judea.
- The words of Jesus presuppose a means by which this significant event will be known more widely than just Judea.
- The event is of such significance that it will be widely known.
- I am one among many who believe this event will be known by all the world because it is connected with the Antichrist, the “man of lawlessness” as Paul calls him, also known as “the beast” in the book of Revelation.

The Abomination of Desolation

1. What is an Abomination?²

- The Hebrew shepherds were considered to be an abomination by the Egyptians (Gen. [46:34](#)).
- Unclean animals, those which Israel was not allowed to touch or eat, were to be considered as “an abomination” to them (Lev. [11:10](#)).
- In the law which applied during the theocracy of Israel, homosexuality is identified as an abomination in the eyes of God. Thus, we read in Leviticus [20:13](#): “If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an *abomination*. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.”
- We also find that God considered cross-dressing to be an abomination: “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so are an *abomination* to the LORD your God” (De [22:5](#)).
- In Deuteronomy we read that an abomination is something to be shunned, it

is not to be brought into one's house and is to be detested, abhorred, and considered accursed (Deu. 7:26). We also learn that an abomination is something which God *hates* (Deu. 12:31). As one of the proverbs puts it, "six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him . . ." (Pr. 6:16).

- In the book of Revelation we read, "But there shall by no means enter it [that is, the New Jerusalem] anything that defiles, or *causes an abomination* or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life" (Re 21:27).
- In conclusion: an abomination is something detestable and highly offensive, especially from the viewpoint of God.

2. Of Desolation

- The qualifying phrase, "of desolation" appears to speak of the *result* which is ultimately brought about by the abomination.
- This probably refers to the way in which the abomination desecrates the Temple preventing it from functioning in its God-given spiritual function.
- It may also describe an act so highly offensive to God that it trigger His direct judgment resulting in great physical ruin.
- Scripture reveals that the one who initiates this event is described as a "one who *makes desolate*" (Dan. 9:27).
- Not only does he bring ruin, like Judas before him, he is also *destined for ruin*, which is probably why Paul referred to him as the "son of perdition" (2Th. 2:3-4 cf. John 17:12).

3. Spoken of by Daniel the Prophet

- Notice: Jesus presumes His followers are familiar with the OT. **Are we?**

A. Where did Daniel speak of the Abomination of Desolation?

I. Dan. 8:13

Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain one who was speaking, "How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and *the transgression of desolation*, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?" And he said to me, "For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed."³

- "the transgression of desolation" which could also be translated "the rebellious act of desolation".
- This phrase is very similar to "the abomination of desolation" and likely refers to the same event spoken of more specifically in other passages in Daniel.
- Refers to the desecration of the Jewish Temple by Antiochus IV

Epiphanes which inflamed the Maccabean revolt.

- The cleansing mentioned here apparently took place in 164 B.C. and has come to be celebrated as Hanukkah also known as the festival of lights and referred to in John's gospel as "the feast of dedication" (John 10:22).

II. Dan. 11:31

"And forces shall be mustered by him [that is, the king of the North], and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there *the abomination of desolation*. (Da 11:31)

- A prophecy concerning a Syrian ruler by name of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who lived about 400 years after Daniel.
- Fulfilled in 167 B.C. "In this culminating act he erected on December 16, 167 B.C. an altar to Zeus on the altar of burnt offering outside the temple [2 Maccabees 6:2], and had a pig offered on the altar. The Jews were compelled to offer a pig on the 25th of each month to celebrate Antiochus Epiphanes' birthday."⁴
- The book of Maccabees records:

Moreover king Antiochus wrote to his whole kingdom, that all should be one people, And every one should leave his laws: so all the heathen agreed according to the commandment of the king. Yea, many also of the Israelites consented to his religion, and sacrificed unto idols, and profaned the sabbath.

For the king had sent letters by messengers unto Jerusalem and the cities of Juda that they should follow the strange laws of the land, And forbid burnt offerings, and sacrifice, and drink offerings, in the temple; and that they should profane the sabbaths and festival days: And pollute the sanctuary and holy people: Set up altars, and groves, and chapels of idols, and sacrifice swine's flesh, and unclean beasts: 48 That they should also leave their children uncircumcised, and make their souls abominable with all manner of uncleanness and profanation: To the end they might forget the law, and change all the ordinances. And whosoever would not do according to the commandment of the king, he said, he should die.⁵

- The actions of Antiochus IV Epiphanes serve as a type, or model, of another act of desecration in relation to the temple which was yet future at the time Jesus spoke this warning to his disciples.⁶

- Notice the introduction of that which is unclean, offensive to God (idolatry, swine sacrifice) into that which is holy (the temple precincts, the altar of offering). This will characterize the future abomination of desolation which Jesus is describing in the passage before us.
- [Aside: the accuracy of Daniel's prophecy, especially in Daniel 11 which is *extremely detailed*, concerning the time of the Maccabees and the desire to late-date the book.]

III. Dan. 12:11-13

And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days.⁷

Several things are evident from this passage.

1. Daily Jewish sacrifice will be underway. Although there have been extenuating circumstances in history where sacrifices have been offered without a Temple standing, there is a strong inference that a Jewish Temple will be in existence. Indeed, we know this will be the case from other passages (2Th. 2:4; Rev. 11:1-2).
2. The daily sacrifice will be halted and something else substituted in its place. The idea is one of *substitution*.
3. The desolating abomination will be "set up". It is not a *person*, but a *thing* -- along the lines of a statue or idol.
4. After this substitution occurs, there is a fixed period of time during which the godly will be required *to wait*. A time of great patience, but with a known, definite end.

IV. Dan. 9:24-27

Seventy weeks [or *sevens*] are determined For your people and for your holy city, 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. Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times. And after the

sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of *abominations* shall be one who makes *desolate*, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate.⁸

a. Similarities to the other Daniel Passages

1. An *abomination* is mentioned in association with one who makes *desolate*.
2. The desolating act has a specific consummation, which is *determined*
 - “Unless those days be shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (Mat. 24:22).
3. Sacrifice and offering are brought to an end at a specific point in time: the middle of the last, or 70th period of seven.

4. What Form Will the Abomination Take?

- Idolatrous practices, especially false Gods, are considered to be an abomination by God. And so we read of “Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites” (1K. 11:5), “Chemosh the abomination of Moab” (1K. 11:7), “Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon” (1K. 11:7), and “Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians” (2K. 23:3)
- The ultimate desolating abomination will be simultaneously offensive to God on two fronts: moral and spiritual.
- This is exactly what we see when we look at related passages which, I believe, reveal additional aspects concerning this act.

A. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing

himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?⁹

Paul identifies an individual who is associated with the soon arrival of Christ.

- He is called “the son of perdition” (or destruction). He is associated with destruction -- not only which he appears to institute, but that which results from God’s judgment of his actions.
- He exalts himself above all forms of worship.
- He sits as God in the temple of God *showing* (or proclaiming) himself as God. (If he can choose to sit anywhere in the temple, where do you suppose he will pick? The “holy place” no doubt!)
- This man is the ultimate affront to God Himself, substituting himself in the rightful place, both physical and spiritual, of God Himself!
- This act both desecrates the temple and qualifies as an abomination with a capital 'A' to God.

B. Revelation 13:11-15

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.¹⁰

- Here John records the activities of the beast from the earth, who aids the first beast, the Antichrist, in his Satanically-inspired mission.
- He instructs the earthly population to make an image (*εἰκόνα* [*eikona*], an "icon") to the first beast, the Antichrist.
 - The Greek word for *image* can be used to describe a *likeness, representation or portrait*. It has been used to describe the image on a coin, or the form of a statue.
- Whatever this representation is, it is something well beyond anything possible in the 1st century and even into our own day in that the second beast is granted power to give breath to the image so that it becomes

animate and even speaks.

- I, and many others, believe that it is this image which will eventually be placed *standing* in the holy place.
- The sequence seems to be:
 1. the rise of the Antichrist (read about it in Revelation chapters 11 and 13)
 2. taking his wrongful seat in the holy place in the Jewish temple
 3. setting up his image in the holy place -- after all he is not omnipresent and is a very busy man.

5. When Does it Occur?

- Jesus warns believers of the time of the end, especially those in Judea, to watch for this event.
- The event marks the near and definite approach of the end of the age.
- My view is that this event occurs at the midpoint of the final seven year period prior to Jesus' return.
 1. Daniel [9:27](#) seems to indicate it takes place at the mid-point of the final of Daniel's seventy sevens, 3.5 years after the final seven is initiated by the signing of a covenant, apparently which includes permission for establish Jewish sacrifices within their temple.
 2. Daniel [7:25](#) indicates the authority of the little horn, the Antichrist, extends over the saints for a period of 42 months, or 3.5 years.
 3. Revelation [13:5](#) indicates the beast from the sea, the Antichrist, is granted authority for 42 months, or 3.5 years. Since his authority ends with the Second Coming of Christ, his stranglehold on power commences with this act of desecration.
 4. Revelation [12:6](#) and [12:14](#) indicates that the Jewish remnant which flees from the persecution of the Antichrist is protected and nourished by God for *1260 days or a time and times and half a time*: a period of 3.5 360-day years. This protection is needed until the arrival of Jesus at the Second Coming.

The Flight

“Therefore, when you see . . . then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”
(Mat. [24:15-16](#))

1. Why flee?

- Antichrist goes from friend to foe. The covenant he makes in Daniel [9:27](#) would seem to be related to reestablishment of the Jewish Temple and sacrificial system, possibly amidst global opposition. But now he turns abruptly to a systematic extermination of the Jews (Revelation [11-12](#); Daniel [12](#)).

A. Satanic Empowerment

- At the midpoint of the final seven years, he rises from the abyss (Rev. 11:7), undoubtedly Satanically empowered, and all the world marvels at his supernatural recovery (Rev. 13:3).
- Revelation 12 indicates that it is *Satan* who intensely persecutes Israel during this period. It seems very likely that it is primarily through possession of this man, no doubt in association with his miraculous rise from the abyss, that Satan works his intense persecution of the Jews.
- This is no ordinary persecution, it involves Satan himself acting through this individual.

2. Conditions of Flight

- The Jewish orientation of this time of persecution is evident in the passage before us:
 1. Those in *Judea* are to flee
 2. Mentions those on the *housetop* - a common place to spend time in Israel (Acts 10:9).
 3. Pray that your flight may not be . . . on the *Sabbath*.
 4. A predicted time of great tribulation, a Jewish concept from the OT as we shall see.
 5. Clear parallel with Revelation 12 which describes Israel.
 - The symbol of 12 stars and sun and moon speak of the 12 tribes and their parents (Gen. 37:9).
 - The sun and moon refer to God's promises to protect Israel (Jer. 31:35-37; 33:20-26) and the throne of David (Ps. 89:35-37).
 - Israel produced the Messiah.

Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.¹¹

1. Supernaturally protection
 - The “two wings of a great eagle” refer back to God's supernatural assistance rendered to Israel during the Exodus and time to follow in the wilderness (Ex. 19:4; Deu. 32:10-12).

- Those in flight will also be helped by the earth, in what appears to be a supernatural event which destroys military powers in pursuit.
2. Supernatural provision
 1. Extra clothing is optional is is food due to supernatural provision: “let him who is in the field not go back and get his clothes” (Mat. [24:18](#)). Safety of escape is to be valued over the need for taking provisions.
 2. To a supernaturally provided place mentioned in Revelation [12:6](#), “Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (Re [12:6](#)).
 3. Also referred to as “her place, where she is nourished . . . from the presence of the serpent” (Rev. [12:14](#)).

The Great Tribulation

“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.” (Mat. [24:22](#)).

- Unique time in history
- This time is said by Jesus to involve greater tribulation and danger than any other period in history past -- or yet to come!
- He states that if the time had not had a determined end -- if it were to be allowed to run its natural course, then perhaps there would be nobody left alive.
- Although this *could* be speaking in terms of a Jewish perspective (which is a theme in the OT), it seems to broaden here to include all living persons.

1. Includes A Time of Jewish Tribulation

- Numerous passages in the OT indicate there is coming a time of intense tribulation for the Jewish nation.
- As we shall see, this is the means by which God will chastise Israel for the rejection of her Messiah and her continued unwillingness to recognize Jesus in His rightful role.

A. Jeremiah [30:6-9](#)

Ask now, and see, Whether a man is ever in labor with child?
So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins Like a
woman in labor, And all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day
is great, So that *none is like it*; And it is the time of Jacob's
trouble, But he shall be saved out of it. 'For it shall come to

pass in that day,' Says the LORD of hosts, 'That I will break his yoke from your neck, And will burst your bonds; *Foreigners shall no more enslave them.* But they shall serve the LORD their God, And David their king, Whom I will raise up for them.¹²

B. Daniel 12:1

At that time [what time? the time described at the end of chapter 11 -- the time of the end] Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, *Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time.* And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book.¹³

- Notice the sobering reality: only those written in the book (of the Lamb, the book of life) are delivered--only those who come to trust in Jesus and are saved!

C. Ezekiel 20:33-38

"As I live," says the Lord GOD, "surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you," says the Lord GOD. "I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD."¹⁴

D. Zec. 13:7-9

"Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, Against the Man who is My Companion," Says the LORD of hosts. "Strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered; Then I will turn My hand against the little ones. And it shall come to pass in all

the land," Says the LORD, "That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, But one-third shall be left in it: I will bring the one-third through the fire, Will refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; And each one will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"¹⁵

2. Judgment Leading to Delivery

- A theme of great judgment resulting in eventual delivery. (This is *not* what happened in 70 A.D.!)
- This is the means by which God will bring unbelieving Israel to faith in Messiah Jesus.

A. Romans 11:25-27

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. *And so all Israel will be saved*, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And *He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob*; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."¹⁶

What Have we Learned?

1. Believers at the time of the end are to watch for a specific, unambiguous event of great significance to God.
2. The event constitutes the definite sign that the end of the age has arrived.
3. The event occurs in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.
4. The event begins by interrupting a restored Jewish sacrificial system.
5. The event involves a man, the Antichrist, sitting as God in the Jewish Temple and pronouncing himself to be God.
6. The event includes a statue or image which is set up in place of the regular sacrifice in the holy of holies. The image inaugurates a period of false worship requiring absolute obedience by all the world's population.
7. The event marks the beginning of an unparalleled time of persecution for Jews and Christians, especially Jewish Christians.
8. The event marks the arrival of a time of unparalleled physical turbulence and danger, for Jews, for Christians, and even for all of humanity.

Endnotes:

1. NKJV, Mat. 24:15-22

2. Interestingly, Luke tells us that certain things which are esteemed among men are “an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15). And such will be the case with the Abomination of Desolation.
 3. [NKJV, Dan. 8:13](#)
 4. [Ref-0038, Dan. 11:31](#)
 5. [Ref-0306, 1 Maccabees 1:41-50](#)
 6. “the final blasphemy of the personal Antichrist in the literal temple (2Th 2:4) may all be antitypically referred to here under Antiochus the type” [Ref-0409, Dan. 11:31](#)
 7. [NKJV, Dan. 12:11-13](#)
 8. [NKJV, Dan. 9:24-27](#)
 9. [NKJV, 2Th. 2:1-5](#)
 10. [NKJV, Rev. 13:11-15](#)
 11. [NKJV, Rev. 12:13-16](#)
 12. [NKJV, Jer 30:6-9](#)
 13. [NKJV, Dan. 12:1](#)
 14. [NKJV, Eze 20:33-38](#)
 15. [NKJV, Zec 13:7-9](#)
 16. [NKJV, Rom. 11:25-27](#)
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Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0038** John Walvoord and Roy. B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1983).
- Ref-0306** The Apocrypha : King James Version. 1995. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.
- Ref-0409** Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.
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Links Mentioned Above

[a](http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm) - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.