

What is the “Abomination of Desolation”?

*Several scriptures refer to it, but do you know what it is?
Is it something merely from history—or a soon-coming
prophesied event? Prepare for the shocking facts!*

The term “abomination of desolation” appears in Matthew 24:15 and other scriptures. This subject has generated much interest—along with much erroneous speculation. It can only be correctly understood if you let the Bible interpret itself. In addition, history can broaden our perspective on this intriguing issue.

Let’s begin with Matthew 24. In verse 3, Jesus Christ’s disciples came to Him and asked, “Tell us, *when* shall these things be? And what shall be the *sign* of Your coming, and of the end of the world?”

Christ continued to explain the sequence of events that precede His Second Coming: (1) Deception by false prophets and false christs, (2) greatly intensifying wars, (3) devastating famines, and (4) pestilences—widespread diseases—following in the wake of warfare and famine. These events are symbolized by the first four seals of Revelation 6.

Next, Christ explained events and conditions leading up to the Fifth Seal: “For then shall be *great tribulation*, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matt. 24:21).

World conditions will have seriously deteriorated. Even God’s people will be affected: “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto

the end, the same shall be saved” (vs. 12-13).

Verse 14 gives a general sign of when the end is upon us: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and *then shall the end come.*”

Do you grasp the meaning of this verse?

Since the time of the first-century apostles, the true gospel did not go out as a witness to all the world *until* the mid-twentieth century. Astounding, but true! This sign is still being fulfilled.

(The gospel that most professing Christians assume as true is not the gospel Jesus Christ taught. It is a counterfeit! To learn more, refer to our booklet *Which is the REAL GOSPEL?*)

Now we come to Matthew 24:15, which speaks of the abomination of desolation. This verse gives the *specific* sign that identifies “the end of the world” (more accurately translated “the end of the age”). The earth itself will not be destroyed, but will continue under a different “world order,” governed by the kingdom of God.

“The Beginning of the End”

The true gospel going to all the world is a *general* sign of the end of the age, but the event in verse 15 gives the *specific* sign that the end is here. It is, to quote former British Prime Minister Winston

Churchill, “the beginning of the end.”

The setting up of the abomination of desolation will indeed be the beginning of the end. It ushers in the flight—escape—of God’s true Church (Matt. 24:20-21; Rev. 12:6). This is immediately followed by the Great Tribulation and other key events, detailed in Revelation.

Matthew 24:15-16 reads, “When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso reads, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judea *flee into the mountains...*”

The parenthetical expression in verse 15 is there for a purpose. Christ is warning the reader to pay close attention and understand what it means. This verse could well have said, “When you see this happen, hurry up and get out!”

Verse 16 describes the escape of God’s people to a location where they will be protected during the tribulation and the “Day of the Lord.” These events begin after the Church is “in her place” (Rev. 12:14).

A Look at the Greek

The word “abomination” in Matthew 24:15 is derived from the Greek word *bdelusso*, meaning “a foul thing, loathsome on account of its stench, a detestable thing.”

The word “desolation” is derived from the Greek word *eremoo*, meaning “to lay waste, to make desolate, come to nought.”

So an “abomination of desolation” is something detestable that destroys, or lays waste. We shall see that this has happened to Jerusalem in the past—and prophecy reveals that it will occur once again.

To understand prophecy, it is crucial that you grasp the concept of duality—a former and latter fulfillment—of a prophecy. God usually gives a *former* “type” in order for us to understand the *latter* fulfillment. The former is *not* the primary purpose of a prophecy. It only points to the latter fulfillment, which is the main focus and purpose of the prophecy.

Understanding the “abomination of desolation” is so crucial that God has provided *two* former fulfillments of the ultimate end-time fulfillment, which is soon to come. The first is mentioned in the book of Daniel.

The First Fulfillment

In Daniel 11:31, we find a prophecy that was fulfilled and documented in history. The series of events foretold in Daniel 11 constitute the longest and most detailed prophecy in the Bible. (For a thorough explanation of that prophecy, read our free booklet, *The MID-EAST in Bible Prophecy*.)

Verse 31 states, “And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that makes desolate.”

This verse, taken out of context, does not give the full picture of the event described. After the death of Alexander the Great, in 331 B.C., the Grecian empire was divided into four regions, each ruled by one of his four generals.

One region, the Seleucid empire to the north of Judea (including Syria), eventually assimilated much additional territory. It was constantly in conflict with another of these regions, the Ptolemaic empire to the south (based in Egypt). The boundaries between these adversarial empires were originally in Syria, but moved continually during the

ongoing confrontations for over two and a half centuries.

This placed the region of Judea in the middle of the disputed territories between the king of the north and the king of the south.

In about 176 B.C., as Antiochus IV (king of the north) had acquired the kingdom from his older brother (*A Manual of Ancient History*, Rawlinson). After this, Antiochus Epiphanes removed the high priest in Jerusalem and installed someone who was loyal to him. Antiochus Epiphanes grew in power and influence. Although his father and grandfather had shown favor to the Jews, he took steps to alienate them at every opportunity.

Upon a triumphant return from Egypt, in 168 B.C., he sacked the temple at Jerusalem and took its golden vessels.

Shortly thereafter, following a less successful confrontation with Egypt, which had enlisted the help of Rome, Antiochus returned to vent his anger against the Jews as he was returning to his capitol at Antioch. He offered favor to any of the Jews who would renounce their beliefs and practices.

Then Antiochus dispatched troops to Judea in 167 B.C., destroying the temple and its sanctuary. (However, the basic structure of the temple remained intact and was later restored.) This act did away with the daily sacrifice. Antiochus then set up an image directly on the alter of the temple—thus *defiling* and making it *desolate*.

The image he set up was that of Jupiter Olympus (Rawlinson, p. 255). This is the same image that the historic counterfeit church has pawned off to the world as the image of Jesus Christ. As if this were not enough, Antiochus further alienated the Jews by offering swine’s blood upon the alter.

These historical events constituted an unmistakable fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel 11:31. This was one of the former fulfillments or types of the end-time “abomination of desolation.” But there was another type (or former fulfillment), which occurred about two centuries later.

The Second Fulfillment

Let’s begin with the Roman siege and destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

For years leading up to the siege, the

persecution of Jews and Christians increased. Many considered this the result of the Jewish wars that ignited up in A.D. 66. Contrary to Roman claims, the main catalyst for the Jews’ rebellion was *not* their unpredictable fanaticism. Rather, the scandalous and unscrupulous Roman procurators in Judea continually provoked the Jews. They plundered the temple and looted the priests ornamental garments, along with other sacred treasures. This was the breaking point and sparked the inevitable revolt (*Wars of the Jews*, Josephus, book II, chapters XIV-XVI).

During the first century, the Romans considered Christians to be nothing more than a Jewish sect. They took revenge against them along with the Jews.

In A.D. 66, the Roman army, under General Cestius, came in sight of the walls of Jerusalem and could have taken the city at that time. But for some unknown reason, Cestius stopped his momentum and turned back. The Jews took heart and Cestius had lost his chance. The Roman army later regained momentum under General Vespasian. Their advance was suddenly halted, however, as he raced to Rome to become emperor.

Upon his departure, his son, Titus, assumed command. These two delays were not random events. God’s Church was still headquartered in Jerusalem. It was only a matter of time before Rome’s mighty armies inevitably defeated the city.

Christ, who oversees and protects His Church, guided and altered events to allow His people to vacate Jerusalem before it was taken.

Josephus gave a detailed account of various signs that occurred at the time of Pentecost of A.D. 69. He related that many had witnessed, shortly before Pentecost, what seemed to be formations in the clouds that took the form of troops and chariots surrounding cities.

“Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner court of the temple...they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, ‘LET US REMOVE HENCE!’” (*Wars of the Jews*, book VI, chapter V, section III).

God's people *did* escape Jerusalem. Without God's intervention, they never would have been able to leave, since the Roman armies were preparing their siege upon Jerusalem. They had to exit in full view of Roman soldiers, before crossing the Jordan River. They also had to contend with fellow Jewish fighters who might have considered them traitors. With God's protection, His people escaped northeast to the little town of Pella.

Within months, after much horrible suffering and starvation, Jerusalem fell to the Romans. The temple was destroyed.

As a side note, this destruction of the temple took place on the 9th and 10th of the month of Ab of the Hebrew calendar in A.D. 70. The former destruction by Nebuchadnezzar in 585 B.C. also took place in the 9th and 10th of the same month. Even to this day, many Jews still observe this time by fasting on the 10th of Ab and reading (most appropriately) from the book of Lamentations.

To illustrate the brutality of the Roman Empire, we should note the time of A.D. 69-70. When Jerusalem was under siege, and in desperate need of food and water, many Jews were captured trying to escape or bring in desperately needed supplies. To better perceive the utter unmerciful thirst for blood of the Roman soldiers, the following quotes from Josephus's *Wars of the Jews*, book V, chapter XI, sect. 1-2, tell the story:

"So now Titus's banks [mounds of earth with which to transverse the walls] were advanced a great way, notwithstanding his soldiers had been very much distressed from the wall. He then sent out a party of horsemen, and ordered they should lay ambushes for those that went out into the valley to gather food...and when they were going to be taken, they were forced to defend themselves, for fear of being punished: as, after they had fought, they thought it too late to make any supplications for mercy: so they were first whipped, and then tormented with all sorts of tortures before they died, and were then crucified before the wall of the city. This miserable procedure made Titus greatly to pity them, while they caught every day five hundred Jews; nay, some days they caught more...

"The main reason why he did not forbid that cruelty, was this, that he hoped the Jews might perhaps yield at that sight, out of fear lest they might themselves afterwards be liable to the same cruel treatment.

"So the soldiers, out of the wrath and hatred they bore the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses, by way of jest; when their multitude was so great, that room was wanting for the crosses...

"This sight kept many of those within the city who were so eager to desert, till the truth was known; yet did some of them run away immediately, as unto certain punishment, esteeming death from the enemies to be a quiet departure, if compared with that by famine."

The siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 served as forerunners (or types) of the final fulfillment of the abomination of desolation. In fact, Christ's famous appeal to Jerusalem is recorded directly before the key prophecy that He gave in Matthew 24.

Read this passionate lamentation in Matthew 23:37-39: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kills the prophets, and stones them which are sent unto you, how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is left unto you *desolate*. For I say unto you, You shall not see Me henceforth, till you shall say, Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord."

In the siege of A.D. 70, Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, besieged and destroyed. Thus, the sacrifices there ended. Another key element added to this second fulfillment was the miraculous deliverance of God's people. This was recorded for a vital PURPOSE—it *relates directly to the future!*

The Future Major Fulfillment

Now read the account in Daniel 12. This event is the benchmark around which other time frames are reckoned. Begin in verse 8 and continue to the end of the chapter: "And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said,

Go your way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand. And from the time that *the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate set up*, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he that *waits*, and comes to the *thousand three hundred and five and thirty days*. But go you your way till the end be: for you shall rest, and stand in your lot at the end of the days."

(1) God's people are prophesied to "wait" until 1,335 days before Christ's Return. God must—and will—signify when this 1,335-day mark has been reached. Even many of God's true servants will have fallen asleep spiritually, becoming *blind* to the urgency of events around them—to *what* is happening and *when*. (Understand! Luke 21:19, coupled with Matthew 24:13, reveals that true Christians survive in the end time—physically and spiritually—by practicing extraordinary *patience* and *endurance*.)

(2) Forty-five days later, the abomination is set up—1,290 days before the Second Coming. This allows thirty days for the Church to flee to "her place" of protection (Rev. 12:6; Matt. 24:16-20).

(3) The Great Tribulation begins (Matt. 24:21), lasting for 2½ years, followed by the Day of the Lord. Together, these events last for 3½ years, fulfilling the 1,260 days before Christ's Return.

The above thirty-day period is the time cited in Hosea 5:7: "They have dealt treacherously against the LORD: for they have begotten strange children: *now shall a month [thirty days] devour them with their portions.*" This triggers the time of "Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7), when the cities of the modern-day descendants of ancient Israel will be laid waste (Jer. 4:7; Ezek. 6:6; 12:20). This is why Matthew 24 and Luke 21 stress *great haste and urgency* in the Church's flight into a place of safety.

Remember that Matthew 24:16 points to the abomination of desolation—when Jerusalem will be besieged by armies—as the signal for God's people to flee.

Luke reinforces this timing: “And when you shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the DESOLATION thereof is near. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! For there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (21:20-24).

Every mention of the abomination of desolation in Daniel (12:11; 11:31, 9:27; 8:11-13), shows that the daily sacrifice is taken away. Antiochus Epiphanes did this in 167 B.C. And Titus did the same in A.D. 70, when his soldiers sacked and destroyed the temple, bringing the sacrifices to a halt.

The spirit behind both of these actions is identified in Daniel 9:27. This verse addresses the final week of the 70 weeks prophecy and shows that Christ would be cut off in the middle of the week (after the 3½ “days” —actually

3½ years—of His earthly mission).

The phrase at the end of the verse reads, “...and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.”

The context of the final word “desolate” refers to the perpetrator, or “causer of desolation” (*Jamison, Faussett and Brown Commentary*, volume 1, p. 757), hence, the “Desolator”—Satan. To paraphrase: “the abomination shall defile the sanctuary until the end when the appointed doom or judgment falls upon Satan.”

For future sacrifices to be taken away, it appears that there will first be a temporary restoration of the sacrifices by orthodox Jews at Jerusalem. After the Levitical system of daily sacrifices is restored, the beast power, guided by Satan, will intervene and “take away” the sacrifices once more. Technically, a temple structure may not need to exist in order for the Jews to inaugurate daily sacrifices. But time will tell what particular steps will be taken.

“Watch You Therefore, and Pray”

At this time, the land of modern Judah is in great turbulence. There are certain movements pressing toward beginning

daily sacrifices at the site of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. A number of web sites exist, advocating this very action. They discuss the rare presence of red heifers and other prerequisites to the sacrificial system, and seek to hasten the coming of the Messiah. When the sacrifices are implemented, they will eventually serve as a catalyst for a prophetic backlash. According to Luke 21:20, this could bring about the very sign of the abomination of desolation—Jerusalem surrounded by armies of the beast!

The intensity of clashes and confrontations in Jerusalem escalates with each month. Meanwhile, God’s Church diligently labors to warn this dying world. His people seek to spread this “eleventh hour” warning to as many as can be reached.

Christ commands His servants, “Watch you therefore, and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to ESCAPE all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (vs. 36).

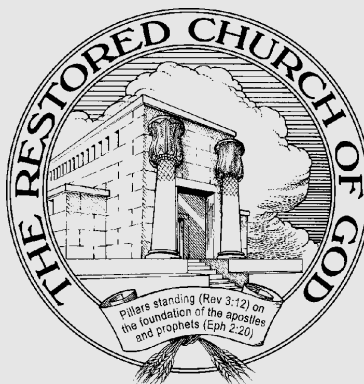
Christians must watch world events in order to recognize the formation of the final beast power, which will lead to Jerusalem being surrounded by its armies. *This* is the precursor or sign of the final fulfillment of the abomination of desolation—truly “the beginning of the end”! □

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