

79 Mark 13:14

The Abomination of Desolation

Text

14 “But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Introduction

Last week we finished the landmarks of Christ's prophecy - those things which mark the road, but do not serve as signs of the end. There are non-specific calamities which do not select for Christians alone such as wars, earthquakes, famines, etc. The second section touched on things quite specific to Christians; the proclamation of the gospel, testimonies before kings, and gospel-directed persecution. These serve as signs that the disciples should expect to encounter and which should not draw them aside from their gospel work.

Our text for this morning is but one verse. Because so much attention has been paid to this and other such passages in the last 100 years, and because I believe that it has largely been abused, it warrants a closer examination. One of your previous reading assignments was Daniel ch 9. It from that chapter, in part, from whence this phrase "abomination of desolation" owes its origin. We will give greater attention to it next week.

This morning I want to provide some background to this phrase. First, this should be understood as a fulfillment of the curses of the covenant. Second, I want to show where this prophecy was first fulfilled, that is where its penultimate fulfillment is found. This will aid in our understanding of and lead into a discussion of the ultimate fulfillment.

“But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

This marks a change in the story. When should they take flight? When they hear of wars? No, not yet. When they hear of famines? No, for the end is not yet. When they feel earthquakes? No. These are all the things that lead up to that time but which should not cause you great concern. The landmarks change in today's passage. When you see the abomination of desolation, that is the time to flee. Naturally the question now becomes, "What is the abomination of desolation that we are to look for?" I am going to argue that the abomination is the Roman army and that they made the temple desolate in AD 70.

Covenant Curses

It is useful for us to consider the covenant curses that would come upon Israel for her disobedience. Leviticus 26:27-33

27 “But if in spite of this you will not listen to me, but walk contrary to me, 28 then I will walk contrary to you in fury, and I myself will discipline you sevenfold for your sins. 29 You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters. 30 And I will destroy your high places and cut down your incense altars and cast your dead bodies upon the dead bodies of your idols, and my soul will abhor you. 31 And I will lay your cities waste and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing aromas. 32 And I myself will devastate the land, so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled at it. 33 And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you, and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste.

Jeremiah continues along the same lines when he gives these prophecies (see also [eze 5:9-14; 6:4-14; 33:27-29](#)):

Jeremiah 7:30-34 “For the sons of Judah have done evil in my sight, declares the Lord. They have set their detestable things in the house that is called by my name, to defile it. 31 And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind. 32 Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when it will no more be called Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth, because there is no room elsewhere. 33 And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth, and none will frighten them away. 34 And I will silence in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, for the land shall become a waste.

Jeremiah 9:10-14 “I will take up weeping and wailing for the mountains, and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness, because they are laid waste so that no one passes through, and the lowing of cattle is not heard; both the birds of the air and the beasts have fled and are gone. 11 I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a lair of jackals, and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant.”

12 Who is the man so wise that he can understand this? To whom has the mouth of the Lord spoken, that he may declare it? Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness, so that no one passes through? 13 And the Lord says: “Because they have forsaken my law that I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice or walked in accord with it, 14 but have stubbornly followed their own hearts and have gone after the Baals, as their fathers taught them.

Jeremiah 13:24-27 I will scatter you like chaff driven by the wind from the desert. 25 This is your lot, the portion I have measured out to you, declares the Lord, because you have forgotten me and trusted in lies. 26 I myself will lift up your skirts over your face, and your shame will be seen. 27 I have seen your **abominations**, your adulteries and neighings, your lewd whorings, on the hills in the field. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! How long will it be before you are made clean?” This was fulfilled in the Babylonian captivity ([2 chron 36:14-23](#)). Finally, Daniel, after having searched out the prophecy of Jeremiah, came to the conclusion that the captivity was about to end. And so he prayed to God ([Read Daniel 9](#)). He picks up this notion of desolation and uses it in his prophecies which serve as the primary source that Jesus refers in his Olivet Discourse. There are three references to the abomination that causes desolation in the book of Daniel.

Daniel 9:7 And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

11:31 Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate

12:11 And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days.

It is generally agreed that these have reference to Antiochus Epiphanes IV.

Penultimate Fulfillment

2 Maccabees records some of the distress:

When these happenings were reported to the king, he thought that Judea was in revolt. Raging like a wild animal, he set out from Egypt and took Jerusalem by storm. He ordered his soldiers to cut down without mercy those whom they met and to slay those who took refuge in their houses. There was a massacre of young and old, a killing of women and children, a slaughter of virgins and infants. In the space of three days, eighty thousand were lost, forty thousand meeting a violent death, and the same number being sold into slavery. (2 Maccabees 5:11-14)

Not long after this the king sent an Athenian senator to force the Jews to abandon the customs of their ancestors and live no longer by the laws of God; also to profane the temple in Jerusalem and dedicate it to Olympian Zeus, and that on Mount Gerizim to Zeus the Hospitable, as the inhabitants of the place requested...They also brought into the temple things that were forbidden, so that the altar was covered with abominable offerings prohibited by the laws. A man could not keep the sabbath or celebrate the traditional feasts, nor even admit that he was a Jew. At the suggestion of the citizens of Ptolemais, a decree was issued ordering the neighboring Greek cities to act in the same way against the Jews: oblige them to partake of the sacrifices, and put to death those who would not consent to adopt the customs of the Greeks. It was obvious, therefore, that disaster impended. Thus, two women who were arrested for having circumcised their children were publicly paraded about the city with their babies hanging at their breasts and then thrown down from the top of the city wall. Others, who had assembled in nearby caves to observe the sabbath in secret, were betrayed to Philip and all burned to death. (2 Maccabees 6:1-11).

This event became seared into the conscience of the Jews. It was, and still is remembered by the Jews. Hanukkah is a celebration of the re-dedication of the temple after Antiochus Epiphanes IV desecrated it. This event left such a mark on the Jews that none could forget it. The desecration lasted for over three years before Judas Maccabees restored the temple. According to Josephus:

Now it so fell out, that these things were done on the very same day on which their Divine worship had fallen off, and was reduced to a profane and common use, after three years' time; for so it was, that the temple was made desolate by Antiochus, and so continued for three years. This desolation happened to the temple in the hundred forty and fifth year, on the twenty-fifth day of the month Apeliens, and on the hundred fifty and third olympiad: but it was dedicated anew, on the same day, the twenty-fifth of the month Apeliens, on the

hundred and forty-eighth year, and on the hundred and fifty-fourth olympiad. (Josephus, Antiquities 12.7.6, <http://www.ccel.org/j/josephus/works/ant-12.htm>)

This was the three and a half years spoken of by Daniel. That time-frame, therefore, became a rich part of their history. Don Carson remarks that most nations have some sort of time reference like that in their history. In the United States, for example, what do you think of when you hear "four score and seven years ago?" Do you think of the number 87? Do you think of the year 1922? Certainly not! You think of Lincoln's Gettysburg address. You think of the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, the abolishment of slavery. These are the things that come to mind. At the time that Lincoln gave the address he did have in mind 87 years, but because of how momentous that was, it has become etched in our minds, not as 87 years, but as a reference to everything surrounding that great address. So when you hear about three and a half years, or 42 months, or 1280 days, it all means the same thing to the Jews. These are references to this period of desecration under Antiochus Epiphanes. Initially it meant three and a half years, but it is since remembered as a time of horrible punishment from God on his people through a foreign hand, no matter the duration.

We have seen some of the explicit fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy, but it may also serve us to have some of the underlying causes before us.

And there came out of them a wicked root Antiochus surnamed Epiphanes, son of Antiochus the king, who had been an hostage at Rome, and he reigned in the hundred and thirty and seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks.

11 In those days went there out of Israel wicked men, who persuaded many, saying, Let us go and make a covenant with the heathen that are round about us: for since we departed from them we have had much sorrow. 12 So this device pleased them well.

13 Then certain of the people were so forward herein, that they went to the king, who gave them license to do after the ordinances of the heathen: 14 Whereupon they built a place of exercise at Jerusalem according to the customs of the heathen: 15 And made themselves uncircumcised, and forsook the holy covenant, and joined themselves to the heathen, and were sold to do mischief. (1 Maccabees 1:10-15)...For we suffer because of our sins. (2 Maccabees 7:32).

The Ultimate Fulfillment

If this was fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 BC, then when was Christ's use of it fulfilled? As we have seen there has been an increase in hostilities between Jesus and the leaders of Israel. Jesus has pronounced seven woes upon them. On the heels of these condemnations Jesus gives his prophecy regarding the destruction of Jerusalem. His disciples ask when this was to occur, and Jesus answer includes this reference to the abomination that causes desolation.

The parallel passage to Mark 13 and Matthew 24 is Luke 21. Luke was writing to a Gentile audience and therefore explained more of the uniquely Jewish phrases. Thus:

Mark 13	Luke 21
13 And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.	17 You will be hated by all for my name's sake. 18 But not a hair of your head will

	perish. 19 By your endurance you will gain your lives.
14 “But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand),	20 “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.
then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out,	21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it,

This fulfillment of Daniel 9 is seen in Lk 21 to be the Roman armies surrounding Jerusalem. We are going to examine in greater detail next week what this great tribulation really entailed.

Application

God is in comprehensive control of everything that happens. The persecutions and the abomination were exactly as he had said they would be. God is over all, sees all, and guides all. Thus when trials come into your life, understand that these were known and ordained. The difficulties you are having with a co-worker, these are according to his plan. The fighting of the children, this was in his plan. The flat tire on your car, that was in his plan. The computer crash, the rush-hour traffic jam, the spilt juice on the carpet, the rudeness of another driver, the dog not able to make it outside in time, all these and a million more things are all according to the plan of God. This becomes a sweet doctrine in the severe trials, but even in these mundane trials, God's sovereignty and providence should still powerfully inform our reaction. It becomes sweet in the severe trials because we are asking hard questions and really wanting to know the answers.

But these mundane trials do not seem to encourage us to sober reflection, they are sufficient only to annoy us anger us, or initiate some form of sin within us. At these times we need to remember that this too is from the Lord.