

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 24 (PART 3)

Matthew 24:15

“*Let the reader understand*” - this is Matthew’s author’s note to indicate to his readers that it is likely that readers aren’t familiar with this concept, or more specifically this passage which is original to Daniel.

Abomination - <946> βδέλυγμα *bdelugma* - a detestable thing, something regarded with disgust or hatred

Desolation - <2050> ἐρήμωσις *eremosiis* - making desolate, devastation, ruin. To deprive of inhabitants.

To sum it up simply: there will be an abominable thing that will happen which will bring about desolation. There are many abominable sins or acts that the Bible speaks about, but there are some which are sort of the “last straw” or the “tip of the iceberg” which bring about the judgement of God, usually in the context of his own people.

Daniel 9

Daniel 9 records a long and heartfelt prayer of confession and repentance from Daniel on behalf of the people of Judah. He is living as an exile in Babylon, who destroyed Jerusalem the temple under king Nebuchadnezzar. God had warned and pleaded with his people for years to turn from their idolatry and return to Him and yet consistently Judah broke their covenant with Yahweh. In his mercy, God would give chance after chance after chance and offer forgiveness up to the last minute, but eventually there was a point of no return where judgement would come against them.

During the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah, God told his people that they would be exiled in Babylon for 70 years as a consequence for their sin and rebellion.

Jeremiah 25:4-11 (NLT) - "Again and again the LORD has sent you his servants, the prophets, but you have not listened or even paid attention. 5 Each time the message was this: 'Turn from the evil road you are traveling and from the evil things you are doing...6 Do not provoke my anger by worshiping idols you made with your own hands. Then I will not harm you.' 7 "But you would not listen to me,...

8 And now the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Because you have not listened to me, 9 I will gather together all the armies of the north under King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, whom I have appointed as my deputy. I will bring them all against this land and its people and against the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy you and make you an object of horror and

contempt and a ruin forever...¹¹ This entire land will become a desolate wasteland. Israel and her neighboring lands will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years.

It seemed like the people didn't believe it would ever happen, but here Daniel is, far from home, aware that God keeps his promises, even as they relate to the consequences of continual and unrepentant sin.

At the end of Daniel's prayer of confession and repentance (worth reading on your own), an angel named Gabriel visits Daniel with a message and response to his prayer.

Daniel 9:20-27

v. 20-23 - Gabriel tells him that God has heard his prayer and that he is "highly esteemed." Gabriel is sent to give Daniel insight and understanding, not only about the immediate return from exile, but about the longer future of Jerusalem and the unfolding of God's redemptive plan.

v. 24-27 - A lot of prophetic detail is in this section, but I want to try and sum up what Gabriel has said. Daniel 9:24-27 is God's response to Daniel's prayer of confession and repentance. Through the angel Gabriel, God reveals that he has a set and purposeful plan for dealing with Israel's sin, restoring what was broken, and ultimately bringing about lasting righteousness. The passage describes a defined period of time in which Jerusalem will be rebuilt, opposition and hardship will continue, and a central figure, an "anointed one," will appear and then be unjustly removed. This removal is not presented as a failure, but as part of God's redemptive purposes.

Near the end of the passage (**v. 27**), Gabriel describes a future act of rebellion and desecration that brings devastation to Jerusalem and the temple. This event is referred to as an "**abomination**" that leads to "**desolation**," - something so offensive to God that it results in ruin and judgment.

In Daniel's context, this language points to a climactic moment when covenant unfaithfulness reaches a breaking point and God allows destruction to follow. Daniel 9 becomes the foundational source for the phrase "the abomination of desolation," a visible act of desecration tied to the temple that signals judgment is imminent. When Jesus later uses this language, he is not introducing a vague or new idea, but drawing on a well-established prophetic warning rooted in history, covenant failure, and God's long patience.

There is a pattern in Scripture we can observe and it goes a little like this

God's people continue in sin, break His covenant →

→ God uses a pagan nation to bring judgment/punishment on his people →

→ Pagan nation is usually arrogant and God eventually judges them as a result →

→ God's people forgiven, restored

Examples In Bible:

Assyria & the Northern Kingdom of Israel - After generations of idolatry and injustice, God used Assyria to judge Israel by exile in 722 BC. Assyria's arrogance later brought God's judgment upon them as well (2 Kings 17; Isaiah 10:5–12).

Babylon & the Kingdom of Judah - Judah ignored repeated prophetic warnings, so God used Babylon to destroy Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC. Babylon exalted itself and was later judged by God through the Medo-Persian Empire (2 Chronicles 36:15–21; Daniel 4–5).

Examples In History:

Antiochus IV Epiphanes - a Greek ruler who aggressively sought to impose Greek culture and religion on the Jewish people. In 167 BC, he outlawed key Jewish practices such as circumcision, Sabbath observance, and temple sacrifices. Most offensively, he desecrated the Jerusalem temple by erecting an altar to Zeus and sacrificing a pig on it, an act considered utterly defiling under the Law of Moses. This event became a defining example of sacrilege and covenant violation, triggering the Maccabean Revolt and serving as an early historical fulfillment and foreshadowing of the “abomination of desolation” language found in Daniel.

For later Jewish readers, Antiochus IV's actions crystallized what “the abomination of desolation” meant: a shocking act of sacrilege that signals the breaking point before judgment falls.

Matthew 24:16-22 - What To Do When This Happens

What the readers (aka those who understand) are instructed to do when this happens is explained in the verses which follow this alert:

v. 16 - those in Judea must flee to the mountains

v. 17 – if you're on the housetop don't get things in the house, implying to flee quickly

v. 18 - whoever is in the field must not go back (to their home) to get their cloak

v. 19 - Those who are pregnant or caring for new babies will have a harder time, presumably in light of the quickness that is needed to get away

v. 20 - Pray that the time to flee doesn't happen during the winter (when travel is harder) or on the Sabbath (when the city gates are closed and resources are less readily available).

It seems that the focus of this is centered in Jerusalem. This is likely part of Jesus' answer to “when will these things happen” as they relate to his first prophecy:

Mt. 24:1-2 - Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. 2 And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian and former priest who participated in the Jewish revolt against Rome but later defected to the Romans, wrote detailed eyewitness accounts of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Here is some of what he wrote:

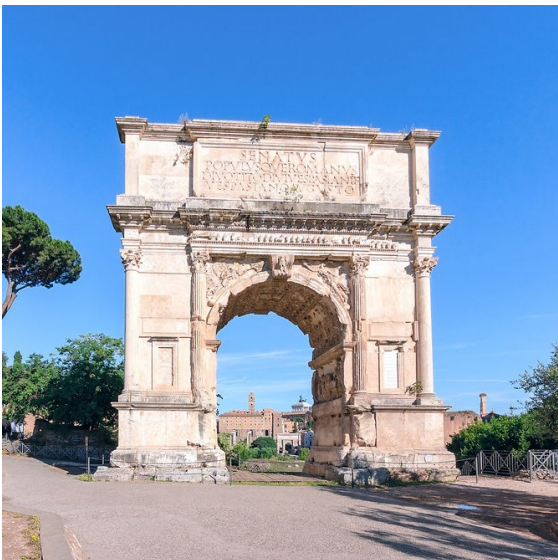
“As the flames went up, the Jews made great lamentation, such as one would expect in so great a calamity... One would have thought that the hill itself, on which the temple stood, was seething hot, as full of fire on every part of it, and that the blood was larger in quantity than the fire.”...“The ground did not appear visible for the dead bodies that lay on it... and the soldiers climbed over heaps of bodies as they ran after those who fled.”...“Caesar [Titus] gave orders that the entire city and temple should be razed to the ground, leaving only the towers... to demonstrate how strong a city it was which the Romans had conquered.” (*Jewish War* 6.4–6.5)

Josephus explicitly notes that **nothing of the temple remained**, except ruins.

“As for the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited.”

“The spoils were borne in the procession... The spoils were carried, each after its manner, but conspicuous above all stood the golden table, weighing many talents, and the lampstand also, made of gold...The law of the Jews was carried last of all the spoils.” (*Ibid*, 7.5.5)

The Romans were so pleased and relieved at the satisfactory solution of the Jewish problem (as they thought) that they erected Titus’ Arch in the Forum at Rome to celebrate the victory.



Matthew 24:21-22 - A Great Tribulation

This abominable act that brings about desolation becomes the trigger point for a time of great tribulation, unlike anything seen since the beginning of the world. Jesus says that if God had not determined an end to this period of suffering, no one would survive. But for the sake of his people, God has fixed a limit. Judgment is real, but it’s not uncontrolled or endless. Mercy still frames the story.

We are called to recognize that this warning was most immediately fulfilled in AD 70, when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by Rome. Jesus speaks with urgency because he wants his disciples to be ready. When the signs appeared, they were not to hesitate or spiritualize the danger. They were to flee, to trust his words, and to remove themselves from the center of what was coming.

At the same time, many Christians understand Jesus' words to carry a further significance that reaches beyond the first century. The pattern of abomination, deception, & judgment may culminate again near the end of the age. While those living at that time may not flee the hills of Judea, they'll still be called to spiritual readiness, endurance, & faithfulness in the face of trials.

This is where the phrase "the great tribulation" comes from. Matthew 24 does not give a detailed timeline, identify every player, or satisfy our curiosity about future events. Instead, it gives us what we need most. It tells us that a decisive crisis will come, that deception will increase, that suffering will be intense, and that God has appointed an end. As Jesus will soon explain, that end is tied directly to his return as king and the rescue of his people (**24:29–31**).

For the first-century believers who heard or later read these words, this teaching was not abstract or speculative. It was practical and life-saving. When chaos engulfed Jerusalem, many followers of Jesus remembered his warning and fled. Matthew 24 was not given to fuel debate, but to cultivate discernment, obedience, and trust.

Many modern scholars describe this passage through an "already and not yet" lens. Daniel's vision found historical fulfillment in events like Antiochus IV and a decisive fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem. At the same time, those events established a pattern that may point toward a final rebellion marked by deception and defiance of God before Christ's return. Jesus' emphasis remains consistent: be alert, remain faithful, and endure.

"But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved." (**24:13**)

For us today, the application is different, but no less urgent. We live in an age filled with false hopes, loud voices, and misplaced trust. Jesus' repeated command still stands: see to it that no one misleads you. Perhaps a new temple will be built in Jerusalem that will be the site of another abominable event that signals another, final judgment upon the city and beyond. But it would be foolish to live carelessly until a building project submission is approved by the Jerusalem planning board. Whether or not future events unfold exactly as we imagine them, we are not called to wait passively for a sign before taking faith seriously.

We do not have all the answers about the future, but we have everything we need to live faithfully now. Stay alert. Do not be misled. Do not let your love grow cold. Keep proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. The king is coming, and his kingdom draws near.

"Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed." (**Romans 13:11**)