

Continuing from last week ...

The Gospel (Matt. 24:14)

This verse is a favorite of the post-millennial view; for at first glance, it implies the gospel must be preached to the entire world before the Second Coming can happen ... i.e., the church will usher in the kingdom through the conversion of the entire world.

Years ago, David Platt preached a sermon at Together for the Gospel, which we played as a Sunday School class. In his sermon, he used Matthew 24:14 to teach that the Lord's return is conditioned on the church preaching the gospel to all the nations on earth. Since we (the church) haven't done that yet (and I agree we have not reached all people groups, and ... we're not even close) ... he effectively implied that Jesus cannot return until this job is finished. This was such a glaring error to the doctrine of imminency that I felt the need to do a 10-minute post-sermon correction the following week. The main part of my argument was that the church contributes to this worldwide evangelistic effort, yes; but it will not fulfill it entirely, nor does it have the language abilities at its disposal. There are just too many people groups that do not have a Bible in their own language. Anyone following the Edelens over in Papua? They are seeking to translate 22 Bible stories into the Papua language.

The completion of this preaching will be accomplished by the angelic proclamation of Revelation 14 during the second half of the tribulation period. This angel has the advantage that he will have "the eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people." (Rev. 14:6), i.e., this angel WILL have all the language abilities needed to accomplish this evangelistic effort. THIS is the fulfillment of Matthew 24:14, not the work of the church.

Abomination of Desolation (Matthew 24:15)

Matthew then records, in verses 15 through 28, various details concerning the second half of the tribulation period. Again, it is from Daniel that we understand that the Abomination of Desolation (whatever it is) will happen at the midpoint of Daniels 70th week. How do we know that? Recall ... Daniel 9:27 and Daniel 12:11. Daniel 9:27 speaks of "the prince who is to come" abolishing the sacrifices in the middle of the week ... Daniel 12:11 mentions that when those sacrifices are abolished, the abomination of desolation will be set up. Note the importance of Jesus statements here. He is speaking of events that are yet future from his time frame. So, any eschatology that puts the abomination of desolation (in Dan. 9 and 12) as fulfilled by the doings of Antiochus Euphanes is refuted immediately (we will discuss Daniel 11 shortly). Also, those who believe the 70th week of Daniel took place immediately after the first 69 weeks (recall the first 69 weeks ends with the Triumphal Entry) have to intellectually hallucinate how NT eschatology completes 7 years after the Triumphal Entry! No significant event happened in that timeframe. Indeed, Preterists would see a literal fulfillment of the first 69 weeks, but then stretch the final seven years to include, you guessed it! ... the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. We will discuss the many errors of Preterism at relevant places in our studies.

Jesus begins this section with the transitional phrase "therefore," indicating that what follows is drawn from what has already been spoken of. Since He has already given the audience the overview of the entire tribulation period in verse 4–14, He gives a stark warning to those who will be alive at the time. He told them to be aware of a particular event that will transpire that will indicate the beginning of the second half of the tribulation period (which has been named the Great Tribulation from verse 21). This event is the setting up of the abomination of desolation, the one "spoken of through Daniel the prophet." We now seek to understand what exactly is the abomination of desolation.

First, notice that Jesus says this abomination of desolation will be "standing in the holy place." The Greek word for abomination here is βδέλυγμα, which means 'something that is extremely hated or abhorred, abomination, detestable thing.' It has the connotation of anything connected with idolatry. Since this abomination of desolation is connected with idolatry, and it is said to be standing in the holy place, a reference to the holy of holies (the inner sanctuary of the Jewish temple) ... we conclude that this idolatrous act of standing the abomination of desolation in the temple is either a person doing something detestable ... or an idol that is erected in the temple to be worshipped. Where do we get this idea? From the one passage in Daniel concerning the

abomination of desolation that has already been fulfilled in history. Recall that Daniel 11 details an extended period of prophetic prediction concerning the future Greek empire (future wrt Daniels time). Verses 1–35 depict in great detail the back-and-forth struggle between the kings of the north (Syria) and the kings of the south (Egypt). In verse 21, one of the final king that is mentioned is “a despicable person” who will arise. This person was none other than Antiochus Epiphanes. Walvoord summaries well here ...

In Daniel 11:31, a prophecy was written by Daniel in the sixth century B. C. about a future Syrian ruler by name of Antiochus Epiphanes who reigned over Syria 175-164 B. C., about 400 years after Daniel. History, of course, has recorded the reign of this man. In verse 31, Daniel prophesied about his activity: “. . . they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate.” This would be very difficult to understand if it were not for the fact that it has already been fulfilled. Anyone can go back to the history of Antiochus Epiphanes and discover what he did as recorded in the apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees. He was a great persecutor of the children of Israel and did his best to stamp out the Jewish religion and wanted to place in its stead a worship of Greek pagan gods ...

One of the things he did was to stop animal sacrifices in the temple. He offered a sow, an unclean animal, on the altar in a deliberate attempt to desecrate and render it unholy for Jewish worship (cf. 1 Macc. 1:48). First Maccabees 1:54 specifically records that the abomination of desolation was set up, fulfilling Daniel 11:31. In the holy of holies Antiochus set up a statue of a Greek god ... In keeping with the prophecy the daily sacrifices were stopped, the sanctuary was polluted, desolated and made an abomination.¹

Since this occurrence (Dan. 11:31) of the abomination of desolation has already occurred in history, and it is associated with the idolatrous acts of Antiochus, we should expect that the abomination of desolation predicted here in Matthew should be of a similar nature.

With a little help from other scriptures (yeah, we will cheat just a bit), we have:

1. 2 Thessalonians mentions that the man of lawlessness will “take his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as God.”
2. Rev. 13 mentions that “the beast from the earth” will tell those who dwell on the earth (strictly unbelievers) “to make an image to the beast).

It is possible that either one of these events, or **perhaps 1 followed by 2**, will be the content of the abomination of desolation mentioned here in Matthew 24. Also, notice the requirement for the future fulfillment of this sign from Jesus is the existence of a Jewish temple! There currently is no temple in Jerusalem. This means what? There **will be** a temple built between now and the appearance of the abomination of desolation! To the consternation of amillennials and others, when the temple is rebuilt it will be a “see I told you so” moment.

Finally, there is also the matter of Matthews inspired editorial footnote at the end of this verse. “Let the reader understand” is an indication that Matthew correctly understood that Jesus here was not speaking to the twelve disciples on the mount of Olives on the day He gave these instructions, but rather, to a future reader of Matthews gospel.

Before Moving On ...

It is an unfortunate fact that almost all NT expositors see the prophecy of Jesus here in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 as primarily fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. If that is so, and all these events that Jesus spoke of were fulfilled in 70 AD, **what was the abomination of desolation?** Those who support this view would say it was the Roman soldiers and the planting of their shields in the temple precincts that fulfilled Jesus words here. I want to take the time to demolish this view, because it is important ... so very important to gain a correct view of future events. There are plenty of reasons why the abomination of desolation was not the Roman armies in 70 AD.

¹ John F. Walvoord, "Christ's Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End: Signs of the End of the Age." *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Vol. 128, Num. 512, Oct-Dec, 1971), pp. 318-19.

1. If we take what Jesus said at face value, the abomination of desolation was “standing in the holy place.” The holy place is a reference to the inner sanctum of the temple, the holy of holies, which is 30 x 30 feet. It is known that Titus was given 4 legions of soldiers to attack Jerusalem; that’s 60,000 men. If the Roman army was the abomination of desolation, how did 60,000 men fit into the holy of holies? Usually those who hold this view would have to interpolate Jesus words as having meant the temple grounds, not the holy of holies.
2. Those who see these events as the same as described in Luke would equate “standing” and “surrounding” to mean the same thing. Standing and surrounding are different verbs ... period.
3. Luke says Jerusalem would be surrounded (by the Roman army), but here Jesus is quite distinct in saying the holy of holies, i.e., the temple.
4. The parallel passage in Mark uses a masculine singular gender for the verb ‘standing.’ It is difficult to envision how 60,000 soldiers in the Roman army fulfill this masculine singular action. Matthew uses a neuter singular gender for ‘standing.’
5. Since Jesus refers to Daniel, this implies Daniel’s writing explains the abomination of desolation. Recall Daniel talks about the antichrist extensively ... “the little horn,” “the prince who is to come,” “the willful king,” etc. Is there any indication in Daniel that he was talking about a Roman army? No, there is none.
6. Perhaps the biggest problem with the Roman army view is that by the time the Roman army could have been “standing in the holy place,” it would have been too late for anyone to flee! This is the point where honest expositors of this view admit their problem. Either they provide no explanation for this issue or they resort to interpolations. For example, Broadus claims “The holy place cannot well mean distinctively the temple in this case.”
7. The Jewish historian Josephus mentions that when the walls of the city were finally scaled, the temple was burned. It would not have been possible for the Roman armies to place their standards in the holy place. In fact, Josephus actually says that the Romans placed their ensigns against the east gate! If words mean anything ... the eastern gate is not the holy place.
8. Josephus also records that the Roman army constructed a “retaining wall” around Jerusalem prior to entering the city. This would have prevented any from escaping.
9. Number 8 above is significant as it is known that it took the Romans seven months to construct this wall prior to their siege of Jerusalem. This would make Jesus words “when you see the abomination of desolation ... flee” almost meaningless; for He portrays the abomination of desolation as occurring rather abruptly and implies that those who see this would be taken somewhat by surprise. There was clearly no surprise in the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman armies if they constructed a retaining wall before advancing into the city.
10. If the abomination of desolation is set up by the little horn, then who exactly was the little horn in 70 AD? It could not have been Titus because he was not destroyed after the judgment of Jerusalem as in Daniel 7 and 9.
11. Finally, what Jews were saved (Dan. 12:1) during the siege of Jerusalem?

Matthew 24:16–20

What is to be the readers response to seeing the abomination of desolation? “... those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.” Jesus now gives specific instructions for the people living in Jerusalem at the time the abomination of desolation is set up. How urgent is the fleeing suppose to be when this event occurs? Matthew records several verses that illustrate the urgency of the flight to safety. These are all illustrations of how quickly the Jews are to get out of Judea. First, those on the roof should not take the time to go into their house and gather things for the trip (vs. 17). Shepherds should not bother to go back from the field to get clothing (vs. 18). Mothers can relate to the comment by Jesus; it would be particularly troublesome for women who are pregnant or nursing new born babies (vs. 19) to flee in a hurry. How long does it take to round up everything needed to care for your young in this day and age? The hope is that this event does not happen in winter as it takes more time to travel in bad weather. The Jews certainly had travel restrictions on the Sabbath that would prevent them from fleeing far from their home. All of these are illustrations of the urgency by which those Jews who see the abomination of desolation being set up are to flee.

Matthew 24:21–22

Jesus goes on to detail **why** the people are to flee upon seeing the abomination of desolation. “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.” Most expositors in our camp understand that Jesus was quoting from Daniel 12:1 in this passage. What does the word tribulation mean? It means distress. Since this time period is the worst tribulation that will ever exist, it is equivalent to the time of Jacob’s trouble in Jeremiah 30:7

and the time of distress in Daniel 12:1. We also know that this distress will occur in the last three and a half years of Daniels framework.

Jesus then goes on to make a comment about the severity of this great tribulation. He says that “unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.” What does Jesus mean here? This is one of those passages that the proponents of the pre-wrath rapture view use. The pre-wrath rapture view says that the rapture of the church will occur around, not the beginning (pre-trib view), middle (mid-trib view), or end (post-trib view), but around 3/4 of the way through the seven-year tribulation period. If we have time later in the semester, we will briefly highlight this aberrant view.

What is significant about this passage is the use of specific Greek tenses in combination. The Greek text uses the aorist tense for the first part and the future tense in the second part. The rendering is “those days had been cut short ... those days will be cut short.” It is proper to see the use of the aorist tense here to describe a clearly future event as prophetic in nature. Showers² explains:

Jesus was teaching that God in the past had already shortened the Great Tribulation. He did so in the sense that in the past He determined to cut it off at a specific time rather than let it continue indefinitely. In His omniscience, God knew that if the Great Tribulation were to continue indefinitely, all flesh would perish from the earth. To prevent that from happening, in the past God sovereignly set a specific time for the Great Tribulation to end.

The question of whether all life is to be understood as referring to the remnant Jews who will be saved at the end of the tribulation period or whether it means all human life. Those who see the meaning in the first view will appeal to the subsequent phrase “for the sake of the elect” to bolster their position. I tend to see all human life here as the meaning of the term as this is the most consistent use in other passages of the Bible. What about the “elect?” What is the meaning here for “the elect?”

In the immediate context of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus uses the term three times. Here in 24:22, in verse 24, and finally in verse 31. Since Daniels framework sees those who are rescued as surviving to the end of the tribulation period, it seems natural to use the term “the elect” here as meaning those Jews who will be saved. The context of the coming false Christs and prophets also hints at the Jewish flavor of the elect. After the Second Coming, Christ will gather His elect to Jerusalem (where He is at the Second Coming). This also favors “the elect” being saved Jews. Jesus is saying that, for the sake of those Jews (as well as all the rest of mankind) that the Great Tribulation period was shortened in eternity past so there would be Jews alive to save; i.e., they would not all be destroyed before they could be saved. Recall that this is Satan’s goal for the Jewish nation during the tribulation period; to destroy the nation of Israel so there are no Jews to repent at the Second Coming. In trying to destroy the nation of Israel, Satan believes he can prevent the Second Coming (and his own destruction). However, God in His omniscience has laid out the plan to cut short the Great Tribulation so there would be Jews alive to repent.

Incidentally, the description of the Great Tribulation in verse 22 could not be indicative of the events in 70 AD. How many Jews were killed in 70 AD by the Romans? Josephus tells us that 1.1 million Jews were killed in 70 AD. How many were killed in WWII? Approximately 6 million. If there were 1.1 million Jews killed in 70 AD, and this was “such as has not occurred ... nor ever will,” how is the holocaust not worse than 70 AD? It’s not ... and thus Preterism is shown to be baseless again at face value.

² Renald Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1995)