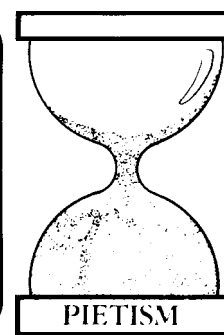


Dispensationalism in Transition

Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence"



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THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION (Part 6 of a Survey of Matthew 24:1-36)

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In this issue of our newsletter we come to the most famous and most misunderstood portion of the Olivet Discourse: the abomination of desolation passage (Matt. 24:15-28).

The dispensationalist holds that this episode "is still future." Walvoord notes under a discussion of Matthew 24:15-26 that: "One of the sources of confusion among interpreters of the Olivet Discourse is their attempt to find complete fulfillment of the entire Olivet Discourse in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem."¹ In fact, according to dispensationalists, the abomination of desolation has been in our *near future* for *almost 2,000 years* (this is due to their doctrine of imminency)² There have long been dispensationalist-exciting reports out that Jews are presently preparing the stones for the rebuilding of the temple,³ which will set the stage for the abomination of desolation.

While dealing with the abomination of desolation, Walvoord offers a table of the "Predicted Order of Prophetic Events Related to Israel," which surround that prophetically significant era. This table is totally incredible.⁴ What are some of these "predicted" and "prophetic" events supposedly revealed in Scripture? I will list two: "2. United Nations recognizes Israel as a nation and allows 5,000 square miles of territory. . . ." "4. [T]he United States becomes her principal benefactor and supplier of military aid and money." Unfortunately, he neglects to provide us with the Bible verses relating to the United Nations, the 5,000 square miles of territory, the United States, and so forth. And I think I know why.

Abomination

Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand). (Matt. 24:15)

in the Old Testament, that which was especially an

"abomination" related to the desecrating of worship, either by outright false worship (Deut. 7:25; 27:15) or by a profanation of true worship (Lev. 7:18; Deut. 17:1). Here in Matthew 24:15 "the holy place" is specifically mentioned in regard to "the abomination of desolation." Despite Walvoord and Company, this can easily be and should certainly be applied to the events in A.D. 70.

Actually the bail is in the dispensationalist's court to prove the case for a *futurist* interpretation, as opposed to the more natural and self-evident *preterist* (past) interpretation, for several reasons: (1) There was a temple then standing in a "holy city" (Jerusalem, Matt. 4:5; 27:53) in the very presence of his audience. To suppose a future *rebuilt* temple is referred to here *must be proven*. (2) That temple had just been pointed to: "His disciples came to Him to show Him" (Matt. 24:1). This gave rise to this very discourse (Matt. 23:38-24:3). (3) Christ pointed to that very temple ("see ye not") to speak of *its* destruction ("not one stone left on another") (Matt. 24:2). This involved "desolation" and included abominable acts. In fact, when speaking of Jerusalem's destruction, Josephus uses the verbal form of the noun "desolation," which Christ uses: *eremoseos* (Matt. 24:21); *eremothe* (Wars 6:10:1). He even applies Daniel's prophecy to this event: "in the very same manner Daniel also wrote concerning the Roman government, and that our country should be made desolate by them" (*Antiquities* 10:11:7). (4) The specific time-frame demands an A.D. 70 reference for the "abomination" ("s// these things/ this generation" Matt. 24:34). It is very important that we compare the gentile⁵ Luke's parallel account in Luke 21:21 with Matthew's very Jewish account. As is often the case, Luke uses language more easily understood by the gentile mind. Rather than the obscure Old Testament phrase "abomination of desolation" (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15), Luke writes: "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near" (Luke 21:20). Except for the pressure of an intricate, pre-conceived system (dispensationalism), by a mere laying one passage beside the other, the casual reader can quickly surmise that the *same* identical events are being spoken about. That is why only dispensationalists make a radical distinction between Luke 21:20 and Matt. 24:15.⁶

The Holy Place

The "abomination of desolation," was to occur "in the holy place." This might be thought to speak of just the

1. Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990), p. 367. I agree with the error of trying to discover the fulfillment of the entire Olivet Discourse in A.D. 70. I do firmly believe, though, that up through verse 33 has found such fulfillment (cf. Matt. 24:34).

2. The events in Matt. 24:15ff do not begin until after the ever imminent rapture: "It should be noted that the signs [in Matt. 24] are in relation to the second coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation, not to the Rapture of the church which has no signs and is imminent until it occurs." Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, p. 392. But, for book sale purposes, they are especially close now: "Those who read the Book of Revelation [which speaks of the same things as the Olivet Discourse] today and are captured by its graphic revelation should sense that while these events have not yet been fulfilled, they could be very quickly, and the time for preparation for the end-time events is now" (pp. 645-646).

3. For the most recent example, see: Oon Stewart and Chuck Missler, *The Coming Temple* (Orange, CA: Dart, 1991).

4. Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, pp. 382-383.

5. His name, *Loukas*, is Greek, not Hebrew. In Col. 4:11, 14 his name is distinguished from the names of those of the "circumcision," indicating he was a non-Jew.

6. See: Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, p. SSS. J. D. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990), p. 249.

temple itself, and nothing more. Surely the temple is involved, *but the reference is broader, speaking of both the city and the temple.* Several problems present themselves to the narrow temple-only view:

(1) Luke interprets the phrase as the surrounding of the city "Jerusalem" (which was considered a holy place,⁷ being the capital of the "holy land," Zech. 2:12.8

(2) The prophecy calls for flight from all of Judea (the region surrounding Jerusalem), not just the temple environs. This is why Christ wept over Jerusalem just before this prophecy (Matt. 23:37). Christ is warning of *Jerusalem's* devastating destruction; not just of the temple's desecration by profane actions. Flight from the region is prompted by the rising storm of war, not of ritual heresy.

(3) The original Old Testament context mentions both "the city and the sanctuary" (Dan. 9:26). Daniel 9:25 even calls Jerusalem "the holy city" (whereas Matthew speaks of "the holy place"). In fact, the original prophecy pivots on the building of the city (Dan. 9:25). To limit the reference solely to the temple, is surely unwarranted. The preceding context of Matthew agrees with Daniel in speaking of *both* the city and the *temple* as being involved (Matt. 23:37-38).

Josephus on Jerusalem's Destruction

The events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Roman armies are summarily designated the "abomination of desolation." The holy city/place where God was worshiped in his temple, was to suffer abomination and desolation. Josephus gives us a clear record of this occurring in Jerusalem's last days, especially after Jerusalem is surrounded.⁹ It was particularly distressing to the Jew that the abominable gentile¹⁰ would ultimately enter into the temple of God, as did the Romans (see below).

When the Jewish War finally headed to Jerusalem, all hell broke loose.¹¹ The Idumeans within the city stirred up revolution within Jerusalem, bringing war into the temple itself (*Wars* 4:5), so that "the outer temple was all of it overflowed with blood; and that day, as it came on, saw eight thousand five hundred dead bodies there" (*Wars* 4:5:1). The inner strife was so bad that Josephus called it "a sedition begotten by another sedition" and "like a wild beast grown mad, which for the want of food from abroad, fell now upon eating its own flesh" (*Wars* 5:1:1). Hence, Christ's dire warning to flee without turning back.

As Titus began his final march to Jerusalem, the Zealots "seized upon the inner court of the temple, and laid their arms upon the holy gates, and over the holy fronts

of that court." They even partook of the "the great abundance of what was consecrated to sacred uses," causing such an uproar that the "temple was defiled everywhere with murders" (*Wars* 5:1:2). They "went over all the buildings, and the temple itself, and fell upon the priests, and those that were about the sacred offices" (*Wars* 5:1:3).

Finally, Titus built "a wall round about the whole city" (*Wars* 5:12:1), which led to those within the temple performing additional sacrilege: John of Gischala "emptied the vessels of that sacred wine and oil [cp. Rev. 6:6] which the priests kept to be poured on the burnt-offerings, and which lay in the inner court of the temple, and distributed it among the multitude" (*Wars* 5:13:6).

Ultimately, Titus' victory is completed: "And now the Romans upon the flight of the seditious into the city, and upon the burning of the holy house itself, and of all the buildings lying round about it, brought their ensigns to the temple, and set them over against its eastern gate; and there did they offer sacrifices to them, and there did they make Titus imperator, with the greatest acclamations of joy" (*Wars* 6:6:1). Although the "abomination of desolation" involves the destruction of Jerusalem (beginning with its encircling), it also culminates in this final abominable act.

Where Eagles Dare

In fact, this very conclusion seems to be in Christ's mind, when He states: "For wherever the carcass is, there the *eagles* will be gathered together" (Matt. 24:28 NKJV). The Roman ensigns, which were set up by Titus in the holy of holies in the Temple and sacrificed to, were *eagles*! Tertullian (A. D. 160-220) writes of the Roman ensigns: "The camp religion of the Romans is all through a worship of the standards, a setting the standards above all gods" (*Apology* 16). Certainly this was a grievous abomination.

The presence of this gathering of eagles was indicative of the death of Israel. Previous to this Discourse, Christ had symbolically portrayed His death-dealing curse on Israel by cursing the fig tree to death (Matt. 21:19-20). Shortly thereafter He spoke a parable of His rejection, which the Pharisees foolishly agreed should be recompensed with the destruction of those responsible (Matt. 21:33-41). Then He spoke of Himself as the "Stone which the builders rejected." This Stone would fall and grind to powder those who oppose it (Matt. 21:43). This is followed immediately by: "And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder" (Matt. 21:44). Ultimately, upon Israel came "all the righteous blood shed on the earth." (Matt. 23:35) This came through the providential instrument of God: Rome, with its eagle ensign. Israel was judicially dead, its carcass was devoured by the eagles of Rome.

Conclusion

In Matthew 24:2 the Lord pointed to the Temple buildings, asking His disciples (Matt. 24:1): "Do you not see all these things?" In Matthew 24:15 He spoke to the same group of disciples and said, "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation.'" He concludes this section of the Olivet Discourse with: "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled" (Matt. 24:34).

I believe an irrefutable case can be presented for the "abomination of desolation" being fulfilled in the August/September, A.D. 70 destruction of the Temple by the armies of the Roman general Titus.

7. Neh. 11:1, 18; Isa. 48:2; 52:1; 66:20; Dan. 9:16, 24; Joel 3:17.

8. For Jewish references to Israel as the "holy land," see: 2 Baruch 63: 10; 4 Ezra 13:48; 2 Maccabees 1:7. I have recommended research tools before; I shall do so once again. The two-volume set edited by James H. Charlesworth, entitled *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), is an excellent resource containing scores of ancient works, such as the Sibylline Oracles, the books of Baruch and Enoch, various Testaments and Apocalypses, and so forth. This would be a wonderful birthday present for your wife!

9. I highly recommend the reading of Josephus' *Wars of the Jews*, especially Books 4-7, in conjunction with the Olivet Discourse and Revelation. I have in mind publishing one day a "harmony" of Revelation with *Wars of the Jews*. The correspondences are remarkable. For a few examples, see my *Before Jerusalem Fell* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 14.

10. Acts 10:28; 11:2-3; cf. Eph. 2:14.

11. I mean this somewhat literally. Demonism seems to have been a real factor in the War. Cp. Rev. 9 and Matt. 12:41-45 (especially v. 45).